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Rebels with Causes: Pornography, perverse sexuality and their application in the works of Pauline Réage, Anne Rice and Marian Engel

by

Karen Jean Virag ©

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University of Alberta

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Abstract

Rebels with Causes: Pornography, perverse sexuality and their application in the works of Pauline Réage, Anne Rice and Marian Engel.

by

Karen Jean Virag

Although representations of sex and sexuality are as old as humankind, the term "pornography" is relatively recent, dating from around the end of the 1700s. This thesis explores the genesis and evolution of modern pornography, proposing it to be a result of a confluence of many factors, including history, sociology, religion, and various intellectual movements. This thesis then discusses three novels written by female writers, *Histoire d'O* by Pauline Réage, *Bear* by Marian Engel and *Exit to Eden* by Anne Rice all of which use pornographic elements and specifically perverse sexuality to explore various notions regarding identity, culture and female sexuality. The concluding chapter discusses pornography as a valid artistic endeavour and social product, explores feminist critical paradigms vis à vis pornography, and describes how the three writers in question challenge the hegemony of orthodox feminist stands regarding pornography.

Contents

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE WHAT IS PORNOGRAPHY?

Introduction, 3
1 Defining Terms, 6
2 The Rise of the Pornographic Imagination, 14
3 Modern Pornography, 24

CHAPTER TWO S & M: FREEDOM IN CAPTIVITY—PAULINE REAGE'S *HISTOIRE d'O* AND ANNE RICE'S *EXIT TO EDEN*

Introduction, 27
1 A Brief Overview of Sado-Masochism, 29
2 Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O*—The Story of *Story of O*, 34
3 Anne Rice's *Exit to Eden*, 56
4 *O* and *Eden*, 64
5 The Imaginative World of S/M—The Agony and the Ecstasy, 66
6 S/M Writ Large, 71

CHAPTER THREE BESTIALITY: THE LAST TABOO–MARIAN ENGEL'S *BEAR*

Introduction, 75
1 The Body of the Beast, 76
2 The Nature of the Beast, 82
3 The Bear, 86
4 *Bear* as a Romantic Quest, 88
5 The Special Place of Animals, 91
6 Breaking the Taboo, 95

CHAPTER FOUR A RECONSIDERATION

Introduction, 101
1 But Is It Art?, 104
2 Feminism and Pornography: A Distaff David Meets Goliath, 109
3 Rebels with Causes, 118
CHAPTER FIVE Epilogue, 125
Works Cited and Consulted, 127

Introduction

It is a singularly paradoxical fact that in Western culture the act that ensures the very survival and continuation of the species is enmeshed in a veritable imbroglio of superstition, fascination, fear, loathing, disapprobation and sometimes sheer ignorance. Human sexuality arouses a broad range of reactions, yet is subject to no one definitive interpretation or understanding. While the issue of sexuality expressed through art raises the hackles of some, others promote it, while still others may not like it, but vigorously defend it, finding censorship even more distasteful. The topic of sexuality is not a singular one, branching out to touch many disciplines and areas of study—psychology, history, politics, sociology, religious beliefs—while at the same time tending to expose many of society's inconsistencies and hypocrisies.

Violence is such an indelible part of the cultural landscape that we hardly seem to notice it; television movies about crime are as common as seagulls at a garbage dump, the nightly news is a veritable litany of violent and grisly events. Criminals like Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone and the Godfather have all achieved folk hero status, while the sight of a naked breast on television has people scrambling for their phones to complain about the "disgusting" sight of it; "True Crime" sections in book stores offer shelf upon shelf of paperbacks with lurid covers recounting grisly tales of real murders, rapes, mutilations and assorted miscreant behaviour, while erotica barely rates a section. To say that there is something curious and incomprehensible about all of this is stating the obvious: a culture which purports to value love and affection and fraternity suppresses the expression of these things if they suggest even a hint of sexuality, treating them as though they were shameful secrets, while at the same time, almost delighting in destruction and violent perversions—the American movie deemed best of the year in 1991, *Silence of the Lambs*, concerned a psychopath who captures women, keeps them hostage in a filthy basement, starves them and then kills them to make clothes out of their skins. We pretend to be disgusted by violence even as we revel in it and reward it; we pretend to value love even as we censor sex and suppress the physical display of it.

North American culture, with its strong puritanical roots and history of prudery, has always been suspicious of and hostile to the artistic representations of sex, be it in books, movies or visual art. Instead of a being a simple biological fact, sex has become moral and political; instead of a depiction of an oft repeated, universal and essentially commonplace act, erotic or pornographic art is imbued with the power to corrupt and undermine entire nations—there are still those who believe that the fall of the Roman empire was caused by too much fornication. However, pornography is a term that is imbued with many shades of meaning and many different interpretations. And just as one man's meat is another's poison, one man's pornography is another's erotica (usually yours is the pornography, mine is erotica) and yet another's filth and degradation. Or as D.H. Lawrence, himself the victim of censorship, put it so succinctly, "What is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another."

Nevertheless, all human societies are fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies, and ours no less. So the task at hand is not to reconcile the irreconcilable, or to engage in dead-end semantic arguments about the definition of pornography. Rather, it is to explore how and why pornography means what it does in this epoch and this culture; to examine some works in which the pornographic meets the literary with interesting results and to comment on various critical approaches to the endless, but never dull, debate over pornography.

Chapter ONE

What Is Pornography?

> Attempts at a definition of pornography have not been wanting; they pile one on top of the other, each tinkering with the last and leaving flaws for the next to tinker with, but none has come closer to pinning down the thing than Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's unjudicial bleat, "I know it when I see it": If no one could define a skunk more closely than that, campers would be in trouble.
> —Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum*

> Pornography is one of the branches of
> literature—science fiction is another—aiming
> at disorientation, at psychic dislocation.
> —Susan Sontag, literary critic

> . . . pornography is violence against women.
> — Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler,
> *A Feminist Dictionary*

Introduction

Upon a recent visit to my neighbourhood Coles Books, I was surprised to find literally dozens of copies of the Penguin edition of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, more commonly known as *Fanny Hill*, in a large bin along with other more standard Penguin Classics, such as *Silas Marner* and *Pride and Prejudice*. There was a sign appended to the bin reading, "Penguin Classics—Reduced Prices." Originally published in 1748-49, *Fanny Hill* is the story of an impoverished orphan girl in 18th-century England who goes to London and eventually turns to the avails, and delights, of prostitution. The novel was later vilified for its minute examination of the varieties of sexuality, all described in close physiological detail, and was not cleared for sale in the Unites States until 1966, and as recently as 1964 was still on trial in Great Britain. *Fanny Hill*, now a member of that august line of Penguin Classics? After all, Penguin has been publisher to generations of impressionable university students and its many volumes are given a place of honour in the "Literature" section of Coles, as opposed to the "Fiction" or "Best Sellers" sections. *Fanny's* current designation as a Penguin Classic, and its easy accessibility to "innocent" youths and perverts alike can only mean that it is no longer considered a destroyer of morals or a corrupter of innocence. In fact, being deemed a Penguin Classic lends it a veneer of intellectual respectability.

This change in attitude toward *Fanny* can be attributed to a number of factors: age—the older a work of art, be it a novel, a painting or a sculpture, the more nostalgic it seems and the more likely it is to be seen as quaint and unthreatening. Consider the varying reactions to, for example, Titian's nude Venuses compared to some contemporary nudes entered in an Edmonton art contest several years ago. Titian's Italian nudes have become part of the canon of Western art; the Edmontonian nudes, however, were not as warmly or respectfully received, and their display in a downtown mall behind a baffle board warranted large signs warning the public about the potentially upsetting material ahead. In the United States, the homoerotic and highly acclaimed photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, seen by so few but scorned by so many, have recently given rise to acrimonious debates over funding for the [illegible] the nature and function of art in general and that most contentious and undefinable of things, community standards. Language is another factor that renders Cleland's work somewhat impotent. *Fanny* is written in overblown and somewhat fulsome 18th-century English which undermines the satiric intent of the work and which sounds silly and forced to the modern reader. The erotic content is therefore rendered comedic and almost burlesque and even Fanny's occasional heartfelt lament at the cruelty of the world fails to elicit much sympathy in the modern reader.

In any case, *Fanny Hill*, due to the passage of time, the evolution of language and of course shifting values, is no longer considered a threat to the morals or the sensibilities of the modern reader. Like many artistic endeavours that went before and many that have come after, familiarity, even if not breeding contempt, does blunt the edge of outrage, the result being that now anyone can purchase of copy of this once notorious book. Other works have shared the same history as *Fanny Hill*, many of them works which have become canonized and thus are standard fare in high school and university curricula.[1]

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[1] A list of authors whose works have been attacked, censored and banned by anti-pornography forces is too long to include even a sampling. Suffice to say that the Bible itself has been the victim of anti-pornography rhetoric.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is twofold: to define what is meant by the term "pornography" and to explain why and how pornography as we currently understand it came to be. An etymological investigation of the term "pornography" reveals that it is derived from Greek roots, but was not actually coined until the 1800s. This is not to say of course that sexual representations or art did not exist prior to this time; rather, the term pornography came to define an attitude toward the representation of sex and sexual things particular to Western modernity.

For many years, Western culture has grappled with the moral purpose and effect of art, and battled over the definition and availability of pornography. Therefore, in order to better understand the journey from the literary dust bin to the canon, and in order to place pornography in the modern consciousness, we shall first of all examine the historical and religious factors that have influenced our sensibilities. Then, we shall attempt to make sense of pornography in a larger context: any attempt to understand pornography is, in effect, an attempt to understand society.

Part 1

Defining Terms

Eroticism is the problematic part of ourselves.
— Georges Bataille

Despite the long history of opprobrium with which the Christian Church viewed sex, and the long list of epithets which it used to denigrate it, the "pornographic" was not born until the Age of Enlightenment when a fairly common and public understanding of the meaning of the term arose.

The word "pornography" has a long history of mutations. Etymologically, the word is Greek in origin and means literally writing (graphos) about prostitutes (porne). One of the first references in the Western world to the term "pornography" occurred in 1769, when French author Restif de la Bretonne published *The Pornographer*, a treatise dealing with prostitution that proposed social programs and state control of the trade. Hunt (1993, 14) cites an 1806 occurrence of the term in Peignot's *Dictionnaire critique, littéraire et bibliographique des principaux livres condamnés au feu, supprimés ou censurés* which was published in Paris. In the preface to this dictionary, Peignot identifies three classes of offences for which literature could be banned: religious, political and moral. In Peignot's taxonomy, pornography is described as being dangerous to morality and society (p 14). Among the books listed in the dictionary were Rousseau's *Émile* and the *Epigrammes*, *Thérèse Philosophe*, the works of Crébillon fils, Diderot's *La Religieuse*, Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and *Pucelle d'Orleans* by Voltaire. In his preface Peignot scathingly criticized the Marquis de Sade's *Justine*, and failed to even include the Divine Marquis in the dictionary, despite his prolific literary output, refusing to penetrate into the "sewer of literature" (p 16). Nevertheless, although Peignot's dictionary identified and established a pornographic tradition in France as early as 1806, the dictionary did not distinguish between books suppressed for pornography, heresy, political subversion or philosophical radicalism (p 16).

In Germany, art historian C.O. Müller's *Handbook for the Archaeology of Art* published in 1850, referred to the producers of sexual representations as pornographers

("Pornographen"). Müller obtained his terminology from an obscure reference in classical Greek from the *Deipnosophistai* (*The Learned Banquet*) by 2nd-century chronicler Athaneus, who wrote extensively about prostitutes (Kendrick 1978, 11).[2]

In the English speaking world, it was not until the 1857 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* that one of the first textual references to pornography occurred. The OED supplied two definitions. The first defined pornography as "a description of prostitutes or of prostitution, as a matter of public hygiene"; the second defined pornography as the "description of the life, manners, etc. of prostitutes and their patrons; hence the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art."

France and England were the cornerstones of the pornographic tradition. *Fanny Hill* may be the single most read pornographic novel ever (Hunt 1993, 21) and it was translated into numerous European languages: the French-language version of *Fanny, La Fille de joie ou Mémoires de Miss Fanny*, was featured in the catalogues of the Société typographiques de Neuchatel, and was a best seller; German versions of *Fanny* were published in 1792, 1863, 1876 and 1906. Indeed, as Hunt tells us, translations from English and especially French were the mainstay of available pornography in various European countries, including Spain, Germany and the Dutch Republic (p 21).

Oddly enough, even as pornography was becoming a social reality, essentially, the raw material of it was not new. Indeed, sexually explicit literature had existed since ancient times. What distinguished the fledgling genre was how it used sex as a medium for blasphemy and political satire. This raises certain questions "What confluence of events—social, cultural, intellectual, religious—met to make this modern understanding of sex and sexuality possible?

To answer this question, both Walter Kendrick and anthropologist Bernard Arcand trace their steps back to the 1830s and the excavation of the ancient Roman cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, which were covered by volcanic debris during the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius centuries earlier. Both these scholars identify the findings, particularly at Pompeii, as pivotal in the creation of a modern understanding of pornography. Excavations at Pompeii unearthed a treasure house of well-preserved, ancient items that provided an intimate glimpse into the private lives of the ancients, items ranging from kitchen utensils to furniture. However, certain artifacts (like a figurine of a satyr coupling with a goat), elicited great consternation and caused special problems because of their explicitly sexual, "lascivious" nature. Indeed, when news of the findings at Pompeii reached royal ears, King Charles, in an attempt to prevent the inevitable moral decay of the populace, forbade their viewing. As a result of this royal decree, many of the sexually explicit figurines, vases, frescoes, etc. from Pompeii were concealed in a special room in the Royal Museum of Portici in Naples. (Despite the royal ban, however, wealthy and privileged gentlemen were allowed into the museum to view these articles, thus illustrating only one of the curious attitudes towards pornography which exists even today: sexual explicitness and obscenity are considered far more likely to corrupt and debase the indigent, women and children, wealthy gentlemen apparently being immune to such a weakness.)

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[2] Curiously, though, the 1889 Grimm's Dictionary does not list the word or any cognates thereof.

As more relics were unearthed at Pompeii, it became apparent that at least some of ancients lived in a world radically different from the Judeo-Christian world of 19th-century Europe, a world in which sexually explicit articles and utensils appeared to be part of everyday life. Indeed, although Pompeii may have seen more than its share of travellers and tourists, nevertheless, Pompeiians seemed to spend a good part of their lives amidst what looked like veritable forests of phalluses and phallic symbols (in the form of representations of the god Priapus), libidinous frescoes and all manner of household furniture adorned and festooned with sexually explicit decorations.

This discovery of a different and open attitude toward sex caused a twofold problem for the modern archaeologists and researchers: first, how to explain the Roman predilection for such objects and second, how to catalogue them. A number of explanations were advanced to account for the former. Generally, it was assumed that the ancient Romans, as sophisticated as they were, were closer to nature and were therefore able to tolerate these representations while at the same time remain relatively immune to their corrupting influences. As for the issue of cataloguing, the discovery of so many outrageous items and figures at Pompeii posed a great problem for the authorities and the taxonomers. Modern Western culture must be able to name and delineate, to classify and catalogue, and thus the findings at Pompeii threw all well-intentioned taxonomers into a state of great confusion. For how was a 19th century Western Christian to deal with these objects which first of all offended his notion of propriety and second, defied classification because there were no precise words to define them? There was no question of not cataloguing them: it was essential that the relics from Pompeii be preserved, not only because of their valuable antiquity, but also because of their relative rarity; many items had been lost over the ages; others had fallen prey to the over-zealousness of Christianity and had been destroyed; still others were the victims of common thieves. It was vital that those remaining be saved for the sake of knowledge and enlightenment and as a window to the past:

> From the moment the first obscene artifact was unearthed, it was apparent that the ancient and modern worlds different drastically in this regard. Depending on their inclinations, early commentators condemned the one as debauched or the other as prudish, sometimes both by turns; but all agreed that the ancient system of organizing images—which amounted, it seemed, to no system at all—would never do in a later age. What was required was a new taxonomy: if Pompeii's priceless obscenities were to be properly managed, they would have to be systematically named and placed. The name chosen for them was "pornography" and they were housed in the Secret Museum. (Kendrick 1978, 11)[3]

Despite a shifting emphasis, the meaning of the term pornography supplied by various dictionaries continued to emphasize the role of the prostitute. The 1958 edition of the *Dictionnaire Littré* (Gallimard/Hachette) supplied three definitions of the term, adding an artistic dimension: "traité sur la prostitution; description des prostitueés par rapport à l'hygiène publique; peinture obscène." The 1933 OED simply reprinted the 1857 definition above, but by 1962 had changed its focus: pornography is the "explicit description of or exhibition of sexual activity in literature, film etc. intended to stimulate erotic feeling." Bernard Arcand notes wryly that:

> By understanding pornography to mean "texts dealing with prostitution," then, the reports of the Fraser Commission and dozens of other governmental inquiries would have to be called prostitution par excellence. Nonetheless, the word remained ambiguous, and it is not hard to imagine how a genre could progress from a discussion of prostitution to a description of prostitutes and their activities. (Arcand 1991, 127)

Eventually, "pornography" continued to evolve and modern definitions usually omit the connection with prostitution, instead concentrating on both its sexually explicit nature and its ascribed aim: sexual arousal. The 1980 edition of the German Duden dictionary defines pornography as "sprachliche u./od. bildliche Darstellung sexuellen Akte unter einseitiger Betonung des genitalen Bereichs u. unter Ausklammerung des psychischen u. pastnerschaftlichen Aspekete der Sexualität." The 1977 edition of *The*

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[3] There are other "secret museums" in existence. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris houses the famous "Collection de l'Enfer," the British Library the "Private Case" and the Vatican library is said to house the largest collection of pornography in the Western world.

Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines pornography as follows:

> a work of fiction in which there is a considerable emphasis on sexual activity and which is, as a rule, written in such a way as to arouse sexual excitement. It may be funny, serious, bizarre, or horrific, and like any other kind of fiction, it may be badly written. We may distinguish two basic sorts of pornography: (a) erotica—this concentrates on the physical aspects of heterosexual love and may describe them in great detail; (b) exotica—this concentrates on what are known as abnormal or deviationist sexual activities, and thus the emphasis is on sexual perversion. (p 729)

As Kendrick notes in *The Secret Museum*, the definition of pornography seems to have moved from complexity to simplicity, "growing perversely from multiplicity to oneness" (Kendrick 1978, 2). Arcand, who has written extensively on the nature of pornography, provides his own very simple working definition of the term: "a mass market product based exclusively on sexual stimulation" (1991, 126). However, many groups, particularly feminists, are not as phlegmatic as Arcand about pornography, which at this stage in history is no longer allowed to exist as a mere social phenomenon; it has been transformed into a social problem and a political position with a nefarious agenda. Thus, feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, two Americans who have spearheaded anti-pornography movements in that country, label pornography as "the sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words" (Strossen 1995, 59). Kendrick remarks on the politically charged nature of the word, remarking that the epithet "pornographic" tends to be applied to any kind of activity that the ruling class wishes to prohibit (Kendrick 1987, 95).

In any case, it is clear that, although one may disagree about the social utility and the political purpose of pornography, all commentators and scholars can agree that pornography involves sexual explicitness divorced from other aspects of humanity. And, although we may identify common characteristics of the pornographic, the effect of pornography is a much more problematic issue. Instead of splitting etymological hairs, today's debates over pornography centre on whether or not it has a corrupting influence on society and whether or not, or to what degree, it should be available. However, in order to assign a good, evil or indifferent character to pornography, the phenomenon itself must be examined as a cultural construct resulting from a confluence of numerous historical, religious and intellectual developments.

Sex and Christianity—Uneasy Bedfellows

> Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the
> members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.
> What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body?
> for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.
> Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body;
> but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.
> — I Corinthians 6: 15-16, 18

The Christian religion and the theory and practice of sexuality have had a long and fractious relationship, characterized by both ignorance and loathing of the body. In its decided discomfort with sexuality, Christianity has long insisted upon a demarcation between sex and pleasure. Robert Francoeur ascribes this uneasiness to three interwoven threads: the philosophy of Plato, the Stoicism of early Greek-Roman times and the Persian Gnostic tradition (1992, 165). According to Francoeur, within 300 years after Christ, these three factors combined into an irresistible force that gelled in the Christian rejection of both human sexuality and pleasure.

The early Greek-Roman cosmology as expressed by Plato proposed a dualistic world view with a constant conflict between the soul and the body. In this view, the flesh is evil (Francoeur 1992,165). Although he conceded the power of the passions (Tannahill 1992, 88), Plato nevertheless espoused the superiority of the mental, and raised the concept of love to spiritual heights—hence the term Platonic love—which visualized love as ascending from the individual to a contemplation of a universal ideal (McCormick 1192, 245). Indeed, in *The Laws*, Plato suggests that sex should be forbidden completely except for procreation.

The dominant philosophy of the Roman empire at the beginning of the Christian era was Stoicism. The Stoics had a dour and dutiful attitude toward life. They felt that pleasure was inherently unhealthy, and much like the Platonists, they accepted a dualistic cosmology of the spirit and the flesh, warning against the pleasures of the latter. They believed that the ecstasy of sex was both hard to control and dangerous to the health. Sexual desire was seen as an obstacle to be overcome as the soul attempts to achieve divine status. Like the Platonists, the Stoics viewed sex as useful for procreative purposes only. As Francoeur tells us, centuries later, Plotinus popularized this view among Christians. It is this dualistic, neoplatonic thought which informs many of St. Augustine's views and which have therefore coloured Christian thought to this very day (Francoeur 1992, 165).[4]

Finally, the third factor which Francoeur identifies as having made an indelible mark on Christian consciousness vis à vis sex is the Gnostic tradition. Gnosticism (the word is derived from the Greek word *gnosis* meaning knowledge) was a deeply pessimistic cosmology that probably originated in Persia shortly before the birth of Christ. Gnosticism stressed the baseness of all things, the demonic nature of the world, and the body as a carnal prison to which the soul is chained. The Gnostics attempted to meld Christian and pagan views; Christianity thus became a kind of knowledge which the soul/mind could utilize to ascend to Heaven.

> In the early fourth century, emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion. With pagan religions outlawed, early Christian concern with idolatry was replaced with emphasis on sexual abstinence and celibacy as centerpieces of Christian moral life. Refuting Roman charges that the Jews, Christians, and Gnostics were sexual libertines, Christians increasingly abandoned holistic anthropology in favor of sexual abstinence. (Francoeur 1992, 167)

The ensuing millennia saw the continuing Christian denigration of eros in favour of irrational fears which linked sexuality to filth, degradation and defilement. This attitude spread across Europe largely due to the influence of Augustine (AD 354-430), whose writings were to have an enormous impact on all subsequent Christian sexual ideas. Augustine is rather a curious figure. He was known to have lived a somewhat dissolute life, and to have given up two mistresses when he came into the Christian camp (Francoeur 1992, 168). Despite his checkered past, though, once he declared himself a Christian, Augustine became the most eloquent and persuasive of the anti-sex theologians. He epitomized a general feeling among the Church Fathers that intercourse was disgusting; he concluded, no doubt based upon extensive empirical research, that the base nature of intercourse was not the fault of God, but of Adam and Eve (Tannahill 1992, 141). When Adam and Eve sinned, they became conscious of a new sensation over which they had no control—lust. The result was their awareness of their nakedness and their ensuing shame. Augustine linked the guilt of this first transgression with lust; every act of intercourse thereafter naturally became linked with evil, even if, for the continuation of the species, it was a necessary evil. This explained the nature of the carnal impulse and the reality of original sin. Concomitant to these notions was the rise of the belief in the superiority of virginity, both that of Jesus, but also of Joseph and most particularly, Mary.

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[4] It would appear, then, that the Christian prejudice against pleasureful sex is a legacy of Stoic and Platonic thought and is not a Biblical tradition, despite popular belief and American television evangelists. Indeed, Francoeur characterizes the Hebraic tradition as sex-affirming; sexual asceticism, celibacy and the single life are not valued in this tradition, which has also unambiguously valued coitus for the sheer joy and pleasure of it (Francoeur 1992, 164).

> Augustine had set out to validate the Church Fathers' revulsion against sex, and had succeeded in providing a justification that satisfied both faith and intellect. The body was no more than a flawed vessel for the mind and spirit, and it was now up to the Church to propagate Christian morality in these terms. . . . What was clear right from the start, however, was that if it was sinful to find enjoyment in sex, then the great majority of ordinary people were sinners. (Tannahill 1992, 143).

The anti-sex rhetoric of the Church continued unabated. In AD 600, Pope Gregory the Great declared that "sensual pleasure can never be without sin." Thereafter followed like pronouncements from every major theologian: Albert the Great (1206-1280) taught that pleasure is evil, ugly, shameful and sick and that it degrades the mind; Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) taught that the faculty of reason is stifled by sexual pleasure (Francoeur 1992, 168-69).

When marriage was finally made a sacrament in the early 1100s it was not because the Church had revised its understanding of the sexual act; rather, marriage was seen as a way of controlling sexual desire. Francoeur tells us that Thomas Aquinas argued that the less passion a man had for his wife, the healthier both he and his children would be (Francoeur 1992, 169).

One of the first voices raised against the anti-sex hegemony of the Church was that of Abelard (1079-1142), a leading theologian who declared that no natural pleasure should be a sin. Abelard fell in love with Heloise, one of his pupils and the niece of a canon of Notre Dame. Their legendary love affair caused a great scandal: Heloise was sent to a convent and her guardians were sent to castrate Abelard in his sleep. The tragic fate of Abelard and Heloise reflects the choice that Christians were forced to make between a life of the body and a life of the soul (Francoeur 1992, 169).

Part 2

The Rise of the Pornographic Imagination

Eros makes me shiver again
Strengthless in the knees,
Eros gall and honey,
Snake-sly, invincible.
— Sappho, mid-7th century BC

Although the word pornography was not coined until the 1800s, eroticism in the arts preceded that date by many centuries. The word "erotic" derives from a Greek root, *erotikos*, and refers to sexual, as opposed to romantic, love, although, the distinction is clouded somewhat by the fact that Eros was the Greek god of love. Erotic literature, which has been around since mankind first began to paint on cave walls, was normally written in verse form by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Eroticism was a main feature of much of ancient Greek literature, and major themes included heterosexual and homosexual love, as well as incest. Homer himself (8th century BC), the greatest of Greek poets, incorporated elements of the erotic in *The Odyssey* and indeed the panoply of Greek gods was infamous for their amatory misadventures. The comedian Aristophanes (*c.* 448-380 BC) used sexually explicit material extensively, and his play *Lysistrata* is an outstanding example of early bawdiness. In *Lysistrata*, the women of Athens refuse to have sexual relations with their husbands until they call a truce to end their war with Sparta.

Some of the most outstanding of ancient Latin poets, all of whom employed erotic themes and/or bawdy language, are Catullus (*c.* 84-54 BC) who became known for his love verses as well as biting political satire; Ovid (43 BC-AD 17) whose major works include *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*, a book of guidance about love), *Amores* (a series of short, erotic poems) and *Metamorphoses*, a retelling of tales from Greek mythology; Petronius (?-AD 65) whose most famous work, *The Satyricon*, detailed the sexual adventures of a trio of young men; Martial (*c.* AD 40-104) who became the master of the bawdy epigram; and Apuleius (*c.* AD 125-after 170), whose most famous work, also called *Metamorphoses* (but more popularly known as *The Golden Ass*), tells the often ribald tale of Lucius who, through witchcraft, is turned into a donkey, and is able to gain privileged insight into human follies and foibles, both amatory and otherwise.

However, as bawdy and irreverent as were the ancient Greeks and Romans, the supreme contributors to literature about love and sexuality were writers from India and the Middle East. Major examples of works from India include the *Kama Sutra*, by Vatsyayana, who lived between AD 100 and 300. The main lesson of the *Kama Sutra* is that anyone who knows the principles of sexual science, who preserves the *Dharma* (virtue or religious merit), *Artha* (worldly wealth) and *Kama* (pleasure or sensual gratification) and has regard for the customs of the people, is sure to obtain mastery over the senses and achieve freedom (Mann and Lyle 1995, 78). Other major instructional Hindu love manuals include the *Ananga Ranga* by Kalyana Malla and the *Kama Kalpa.*

One of the most important erotic works from the Middle East is the Arabic work *Al Raud al atir wa nuzhat al Khatir* (or *The Perfumed Garden*) written by the Shaykh Nefzawi (*c.* 1370-*c.* 1440) (McCormick 1992, 24) and translated by Sir Richard Burton.[5] *The Perfumed Garden*, like the *Kama Sutra*, attempts to describe techniques for bettering the pleasure of the sexual experience. McCormick also mentions the Hebrew love song which became part of the Bible, the apocryphal and extremely sensuous *Song of Solomon* (or the *Song of Songs*). Finally, McCormick cites another Arab work, which he describes as "the most positively arresting, stimulating, and cleverly told tales of love and adventure" (p 29)—*The Arabian Nights*, which tells the story of a certain King Shahyrar who, because of the infidelity of his wife, comes to detest all women. He begins the cruel and vengeful practice of taking a beautiful girl to bed each night and then having her beheaded the next morning. One night, the beautiful and crafty Scheherazade is his proposed victim. However, Scheherazade, who knows of the king's fondness for clever stories, is a master storyteller and so she begins recounting an exciting, often erotic tale each evening, leaving off just before the climax and promising to finish the next evening. She manages to tell stories for 1001 nights, by which time the king has been cured of his misogyny.

It was during the so-called Age of Chivalry that the traditions of courtly love became established; modern erotic literature spring from this tradition (McCormick 1992, 39). Courtly love is a specialized, ethereal kind of love, in which the lover is always obedient to his lady's wishes, no matter how silly or unjust. He is always loyal;

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[5] A flamboyant explorer, adventurer, anthropologist and linguist, Sir Richard Burton (1821-1890) is best remembered for his translations of the *Arabian Nights*, the *Kama Sutra* and *The Perfumed Garden* (from the French). His interest in sexual expression and deviance and his detailed ethnographic notes led to his prosecution numerous times under Britain's Obscene Publications Act of 1857. Upon his death, his wife destroyed all his papers and diaries, including the manuscript of his translation of *The Perfumed Garden* from the original Arabic (Drabble 1985, 150).

often, abject. From this tradition rose the Provençal love song, and the love poetry of the Middle Ages. Chaucer, Skelton and Capellanus, who used a variety of erotic themes in their writing, were the principal English writers of this time. Elsewhere in Europe, major writers included Rabelais in France; and in Germany, Johannes Bruerinus, J. Hartlieb and two erotic poets, Paul Fleming and Hofman von Hofmannswaldau. It was Italy, however, that boasted the most writers of this genre. The major Italian writer of the era was Giovanni Boccaccio, whose cynical and often misogynistic 1353 work *Il Decamerone* (*The Decameron*) changed the course of allegory altogether: the notions of romantic, courtly love and the unassailable virtue of the Lady began to show some tarnish, while at the same time the playful potentialities of the sexual encounter and the practice of sexual comeuppances were popularized. Other well-known Italian writers of the genre include Masuccio Salernitano, Francesco Strapparola, Angelo Poliziano, Poggio Bracciolini and Antonio Beccatelli. However, despite the apparent surfeit of erotic writers in Italy and the literary pre-eminence of Boccaccio, there is one who stands out as pivotal in the bumpy journey of erotic literature from a literary genre to pornography—the Italian Renaissance figure, Pietro Bacci, also known as Aretino, and referred to by Alexandrian as "the incarnation of literary eroticism." According to critic David Foxon, the history of modern pornography begins with him (Arcand 1991, 128).

Aretino, who was also known by the sobriquet of "the Divine," was born in 1492 in Arezzo, Italy. He was a curious figure: a self-styled libertine and debauchee, he was an intimate of Popes and high ranking families, like the Medicis. He was famous for two works in particular: a prose work entitled *Ragionamenti* (1534-36) which became a first model of 17th-century pornography, and a series of scandalous, sexually explicit verses, known as *Sonetti lussuriosi*, which accompanied a series of sexually obscene tablets which had previously been suppressed by the Pope. The entire package of tablets and Aretino's accompanying text became known in English as *Aretino's Postures*. So great was Aretino's influence that he inspired a school of similar writing and numerous imitators. Aretino's works were the first to display the "combination of explicit sexual detail and evident intention to arouse that became, three hundred years later, the hallmark of the pornographic" (Kendrick 1978, 58). Quoted in Kendrick's *Secret Museum*, Aretino makes a plea in his own defence:

> And I dedicate the lust they [i.e. the *Sonetti Lussuriosi*] commemorate to you to spite the hypocrites since I reject the furtive attitude and filthy custom which

> forbids the eyes what delights them most. What harm is there in seeing a man mount a woman? Should beasts be more free than us? (p 59)

If Aretino was a notorious, even outrageous, figure it was not simply due to his subject matter, his literary abilities or the ribaldry of his language. Rather, Aretino's works seem to mark a twofold innovation in the representation of sex in the public sphere: first, they were noteworthy for their close and minute descriptions of the mechanics of the sexual act. Aretino was no ethereal eulogizer of the beauty of lovemaking; rather, his descriptions were bawdy and calculated. As Kendrick notes (1978, 65), this detached treatment of the mechanics of sex reflected a certain intellectualization of the subject, an attribute which has become one of the hallmarks of the modern pornographic. Second, Aretino's work marks the sexual realm as being distinct from the religious, moral and even legal: for him, sex now existed as a social (and cultural construct) on its own. This shift in understanding is a noteworthy one, and it is evident today in our modern understanding of pornography. Despite varying assessments of pornography, one specific attitude would appear to be common in the modern understanding of the term: the notion that pornography is the separation of sex and love (or sentiment). Those who defend pornography or who at least see its influence on society as neutral tend toward the Aretinian viewpoint—that sexual activity should be considered to be private and self-contained (ibid, p 65). Those who condemn pornography tend to view the sexual act as properly entwined with a whole panoply of emotions, most notably love. For those with this point of view, sex is more than a private act between consenting adults because it implies social responsibilities and obligations, such as marriage.

Aretino had a dual effect on pornographic literature. First, he mocked the mores and morals of his day and the foibles of the aristocracy, itself not an unusual act. However, he was the first to do so using sex as his medium. Secondly, despite its ribaldry, the content of Aretino's work was not substantially new. As we have seen, there had been many lewd writers before him, and Aretino himself spawned a legion of contemporary imitators. What was different with Aretino was not the writer himself, but the accidental confluence of Aretino's salacious imagination and an event that occurred in 1450 that was to completely transform the modern world: the invention of the printing press. For the first time in history, all kinds of written materials were made available to a potentially huge audience. With the invention of the printing press, not only did the availability of the printed word increase, so too did its permanence. At the same time, the control of the State and Church over thoughts and ideas inversely declined as people could now produce their own individual tracts, treatises and books. It was impossible for either secular or religious authorities to censor and control everything, nor were there any apparatuses or structures that could have allowed even the most fervent censor to exert significant control. The effect on the body politic of the invention of the printing press cannot be underestimated because the very nature of how people spent their free time began to change: for the first time, people were able to read for pleasure. In addition, the solitary nature of reading stresses individual understanding and requires individual and private space. And while initially, only privileged and wealthy classes learned to read, the invention of the printing press marked a radical and profound change in the notion of public versus private life. As economies continued to evolve, as public education became more common for working people (and eventually became a legal obligation), the notion of leisure time became a reality.

Because of the invention of the printing press, Aretino's works benefited from the same instant exposure as did those of Martin Luther. In 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenburg; within two weeks, all of Germany knew who he was (Arcand 1991, 129). Thus, the permanence and transportability of the written word were powerful tools in the advancement of the Reformation; Luther was able to advertise, proselytize and popularize his own political agenda. The austere and conservative Protestant Reformation espoused profound societal transformations which would also accommodate the rise of pornography. These transformations included the separation of Church and State, the distinction between politics and religion and the growing emphasis on the transcendency of the self; in other words, the separation of the public and the private and the growing sense that there is an interior self which has an identity and space that cannot be and importantly, *must* not be, circumscribed by exterior factors or forces.

The end of the 18th century saw profound changes with revolutions in America (1776) and in France (1792) seminal in the creation of a new social order in the Western world. The French Revolution in particular expressed itself in sexual terms. Politically motivated pornography spurred on the Revolution by undermining the legitimacy of the *ancien regime*. As criticism of the monarchy grew more virulent, it took the form of pornographic pamphlets that were anti-clerical and highly critical of the court and, eventually, of King Louis XV himself (Hunt 1992, 35). The fever of the revolution seemed to culminate in the works of the Marquis de Sade, who wrote graphically of rape, incest, sodomy, sacrilege, parricide, matricide, pedophilia as well as torture, sexual violence and murder. As Hunt remarks, no one has ever been able to top Sade who explored "the ultimate logical possibility of pornography: the annihilation of the body, the seat of pleasure, in the name of pleasure." (p 35). Indeed, the vengeance of the French revolutionaries took a decidedly sexual turn:

> When the revolution progressed from writing to acts of violence, it would sometimes make the guilty suffer exactly where they had most lived: in September, 1792, for example, when Princess de Lamballe was decapitated, her sex organs were cut from her body, stuck on the point of a stake, and paraded before the prison in which her close friend Marie-Antoinette was being held. . . . By attacking convents or by sodomizing the young boys. . . the revolution was declaring that the political reconstruction of the country could be expressed in terms of sex, and that the power to seduce and rape had once and for all changed hands. Those who entertained more utopian dreams even believed that the revolution had democratized debauchery, and that everyone from then on give themselves over to the refined pleasures of aristocratic decadence. (Arcand 1991 134)

In England, Charles II, in a move which had far reaching implications, abolished ecclesiastical tribunals and declared that cases of divorce and other matters related to marriage would be heard before the Senate. This move further emphasized that the Church's authority over sin was not a monopoly and indeed, this single declaration marked with official sanction the first major move toward the separation of sin and crime in England (ibid, p 132). In other words, the world was being compartmentalized, religion was losing its ethical stranglehold and secular authority was increasing in importance and potency. If the sanctity of marriage was now a matter of public concern, then the source of personal beliefs and the responsibility for personal and private behaviour could also be divorced from ecclesiastical law.[6] This era was also marked by a certain licentious freedom and, because of constantly improving educational standards, a democratization of the printed word: the ability to read was no longer the exclusive privilege of the aristocracy or the clergy. The increasing literacy of the working class, an incipient tabloid press and new laws that promoted a secular vision of the world combined to create markets for all kinds of different printed materials, from penny dreadfuls to fashion magazines to pornography. New markets meant that enterprising businessmen quick to interpret trends and public predilections were now able to earn their living selling pornography: the printed word had become a commodity like the bawdy stories it told, and there was no shortage of eager customers (Arcand 1991, 134).

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[6] Charles' decree had a powerful effect on life in Britain which is still evident today, for it spawned the birth of the tabloid press. Reporters were sent in legions to report on various divorce and other personal proceedings, which previously were privy to a religious authority, and they used their pens and their imaginations to publish salacious and outrageous accounts of what they heard and saw. These kind of reports were exceedingly popular, as the populace seemed greatly inclined to gawk, leer and generally mock those of the aristocracy and nobility whose private lives and excesses were being exposed to the glare of publicity. (These journalists were the precursors of the current "gutter press" whose intense interest in and prurient coverage of the current Royal Family's trials and tribulations are so popular.)

The 1800s also saw the germination of the Industrial Revolution, spurred on by the rise of the Protestant work ethic. The Industrial Revolution, like the invention of the printing press before it, caused radical changes in the fabric of social life: rural workers migrated in droves to urban centres and a whole new class of wage labourers was created. These wage labourers toiled in often appalling conditions producing goods which they could not afford and very likely had no need for. In 1867, Karl Marx published *Das Kapital* which examined the fate of wage labourers, alienated from their labour and pitted against each other in order to keep wages low and the profits of the factory owners high. A profound and subtle effect of the evolving socio-economic landscape and nascent capitalism was the belief that various characteristics of a capitalist state were natural and inherent to human culture; for example, the notion of the natural and unassailable right to own property has become inextricably bound to the Western consciousness. Events concomitant to burgeoning industrialization include a gradual increase in material wealth but an increasing stratification of society.

In spite of perceived Victorian morality, which dictated the covering of wooden piano legs because their curvaceous forms were likely to incite lust, the era experienced a virtual explosion of prostitution.[7] By 1748 the first "pornographic" novels had begun to appear, including the aforementioned *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (or *Fanny Hill*). As a work of literature, *Fanny* is perhaps overlooked on the basis of its subject matter and its concentration on physiological details. Yet, it seems a remarkably prescient work. Fanny, perhaps one of the first self-made women in literature (Arcand 1991, 136), like Aretino before her, talks about sex in clinical and detached terms. Cleland uses the metaphor of the growing industrial world to frame her stories. As Arcand observes:

> Cleland used these terms to describe the new social order twenty years before Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*. His description of the sexual performances of his heroine read like the time-and-motion studies that would

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[7] A figure of 50,000 prostitutes in Greater London by the mid-1800s is a reasonable estimate. The population of Greater London at that time was approximately 2 million (Tannahill 1992, 356).

> soon cause such a profound upheaval in the manufacturing sector. It was almost as if sex had become industrialized before anything else in the Victorian era . . .
> (p 135)

At the risk of oversimplification, the profound changes taking place in the world during the 18th and 19th centuries, from the Industrial Revolution to the rise of the Protestant work ethic to the creation of a wage labour class to the 1859 publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species,* cannot be overemphasized. The social order was undergoing a radical shift and the place of mankind in the universe and individuals in their own society was likewise changing drastically. *Fanny Hill* reflects precisely the kind of dramatic changes characteristic of a state with a nascent exchange-economy, characterized by alienation between workers and owners and also between workers and the products that they produce. Fanny well exemplifies the modern industrial worker, alienated from the fruits of her labour and selling her products to the highest bidder. Furthermore, competition, the great engine of capitalism, ensures Fanny's continued productivity; she is in competition with literally thousands of others (see footnote 7), and her value rests in her skill at marketing herself. She is well aware that the older she gets, the harder it will be for her to continue.

> Fanny Hill belongs to the industrial world, a sexual worker cut off from her origins, preoccupied with her efficiency in producing pleasure, and knowing that she is evaluated strictly according to her professional ability. Sex was thus transformed into a matter of technical competence, a skill that the naive little orphan acquired and perfected, greatly increasing her own market value. . . . What is most astonishing is that this typically modern discourse on objective efficiency and technical competence first appeared in the genre of pornography, years before it would become the official doctrine of economic industrialization. It's as if, all of a sudden, everyone took for granted that the industrial revolution would inevitably bring with it the overturning of sexuality and relations between the sexes. (Arcand 1991, 136)

If the great efficiency of this new economy is that it commodifies everything for which there is a buyer, then sex itself can become a commodity, and every human endeavour can be subject to the dictates of the market place. In the new social order engendered by the new economics of the era, family ties were strained; work was no longer done at home or in the garden, but often in a distant factory. Thus workers became alienated not only from the goods they produced but from each other and their families. Factories were subject to closure or a person could lose his job suddenly; thus a climate of stress and fear for the future is a natural by-product of an industrial economy, in which workers are judged solely by their efficiency, and it was in the interests of the market place that workers be kept on task. Before approximately 1750, pornography was a luxury reserved not only for gentlemen but also rulers and even religious authorities. While the advent of the industrial revolution was welcomed by the upper classes for the wealth is brought them, the continuing democratization of the written word and the spread of reading as a pastime implied numerous dangers. First, the very notion of a "pastime" denoted a time for non-productive leisure; second, reading itself was suspect because it involved the use of fantasy which was seen, at best, as moral slackness and at worst, as actual vice (Green and Green 1973, 106). The new economic order required new strategies to keep the proletariat efficient: "It had to be made clear that it was more important to go to work than to make love" (Arcand 1991, 140). According to Arcand and others, what was required was to make people believe in "progress" and "the economy"; exerting stringent societal strictures on sexuality became a perfect way to control both the minds and bodies of workers. At the same time, the working class, fed up with the debaucheries, idleness and luxury of the ruling class, imposed its own code of behaviour on itself, valuing moral probity, respect for traditional values and conservatism.

Arcand sees the redefinition of the distinction between public and private as crucial to understanding how the role of sexuality was changing. According to him, the public had become the workplace where workers sold their labour to the market, a place where Darwinian theory prevailed and where people were constantly pitted in competition against one another; the outside world became a place where vices and immorality were practiced, a place where "anything was permissible and nothing respected but success" (p 138) The private on the other hand was the place of refuge, peace and tranquillity, where the cares of the outside world did not intrude and where love could be legitimately expressed. He notes that it was during the 19th century that the contrast between the chaste housewife, bearer of children and guardian of morality and the public girl—wild, seductive, sexy—was born. Curiously, however, while scientific knowledge was increasing, private awareness of bodies and sexuality was decreasing (Arcand 1991, 138). A kind of universal shame seemed to have taken hold, partly accounted for by the rise of puritanical viewpoints, themselves a reaction to the apparent excesses of previous centuries; the number of prostitutes in London during the Victorian era was epidemic, and brothels specializing in flagellation services prospered, but an illustrated guide to the excavations at Pompeii published at the time failed to even mention the erotic murals.

Part 3

Modern Pornography

For all the lip service we give to sex being holy and wonderful and spiritual,
we let Madison Avenue use it to sell spark plugs and dishwashing detergent—to sell
anything but sex.
— Nina Hartley, well known pornographic actress

The relaxation of sexual mores leads inexorably to every kind of debauchery, until in
the end, it brings about the redistribution of wealth and the equal sharing of property.
— Richard Nixon

Although we have identified various qualities that seem to identify the pornographic, as Walter Kendrick so succinctly puts it, pornography names an argument, not a thing (1978, 31). Political viewpoint, religious upbringing, age and even temperament combine to determine an individual's stance in this "argument." We have established that "pornography" is a relatively recent term, and that what we usually understand pornography to be is a construct based upon the interplay of many societal/historical forces reflecting the evolution of Modern, or perhaps even pre-Modern, man into Post-Modern man. Aside from the factors already discussed, we might perhaps also consider the kind of changes Modernity wrought on individuals and their relationship with society as being germane to the rise of the pornographic imagination. Western culture has experienced a burgeoning sense of passion for self-realization and a fascination with the idea of "self" as a construct. Indeed, the notion that the self could be a distinct and meaningful entity without a social context is one of the defining characteristics of modernity. As Arcand notes (1991, 149) the greatest growth of pornography coincides precisely with the rapid expansion of "individualism," a word heard for the first time during this era. For Arcand, the modern individual is characterized by the need to retreat into himself, to realize his inner potential, to discover his inner being; he is more concerned with individual rights than group rights, more moved by self-revelation then traditional wisdom. Indeed, the theory of self-construction, now au courant in certain literary criticism circles, asserts a notion in direct opposition to what up until modern times has been the given, professed wisdom—that human nature is a fixed and immutable thing. The problem with this process of self-discovery, of course, is the potential for great disappointment: all the frippery of modern life may be masking a horrific truth—that behind it all is a great, gaping chasm.

The logical question at this stage, then, might be not "*how* did pornography come to exist?", but rather, "how could it *not* have come to exist?" With the rise of literacy and democracy and notions of freedom of speech and thought, the appearance of pornography may have been inevitable. As Arcand pointedly says, "pornography exists because democracy exists" (ibid, p 167). Lynn Hunt remarks on the close link between pornography and democracy by observing that it was, significantly, only during the decades of the emergence of mass politics and mass publishing—around and after the 1880s—that most countries began to produce their own domestic pornography (along with other published works). Add to this the heady mixture of the historical suppression of humanity's most powerful and natural impulses and the strangely unlearnable fact that suppression sometimes increases desire.[8] Mix in our obsessions with personal space and private revelation. Finally, throw in the fact that this culture commodifies everything, from underwear and cars, to the intangibles of talent and beauty—it would indeed seem that pornography is an organic entity, springing from, or existing in spite of, our unfathomable guilt and shame and a tangled web of historical, social, intellectual, religious and economic factors. Its prominent position in the economies of the world is hardly surprising: the "sex trade" is a real and powerful part of the market place, and indeed, has spawned many large and extremely lucrative specialized ancillary industries, ranging from shops that sell sexual paraphenalia, to "900" live-sex-talk telephone numbers, to triple X movie rental outfits. The February 10, 1997, issue of *U.S. News & World Report* reports that in 1996, Americans spent more than $8 billion on various forms of sexual entertainment, ranging from videos to peep shows.

By understanding the evolution of the modern consciousness, we may disagree about the morality of pornography, but we can at least come to some comprehension of why a writer would choose the use of the pornographic message to tell a story. Probably, the reasons are as many as there are authors. To date, the pornographic imagination has largely been filtered through male imaginations, which has meant a lionization of male fantasy, and the virtual subsumation of female fantasy. However, the three female authors whose works are under consideration here have all used pornographic elements and images of perverse sexuality to their artistic advantage:

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[8] Despite the fact that, as a legacy of the Reagan-Bush administrations, the United States has the most stringent restrictions on sexually explicit materials in the Western World, it is ironically the largest producer of pornography (*U.S. News and World Report*, Feb 10, 1997).

Pauline Réage, the author of the scandalous 1954 French novel *Histoire d'O* reveals the sado-masochistic fantasy of a young woman exploring her relationship with love and devotion as she explores the limits of her personality. American Anne Rice, best known as the writer of best-selling vampire novels, has a hidden persona which is responsible for five erotic novels. In her 1985 novel, *Exit to Eden*, Rice also used the theme of sado-masochism to delve into the nature of sexuality and the meaning of love. Finally, in Canadian writer Marian Engel's 1976 novella *Bear*, the female heroine explores the meaning of taboos in a scene of bestiality, now infamous in the world of Canadian letters. Each of these writers has braved castigation by various parties: conservatives, religious fundamentalists and anti-sex crusaders condemn them on the basis of their basic immorality; "gender" feminists, in a strange partnership with those who are in many ways their ideological foes, also condemn these writers for their depictions of females enjoying pain at the hands of their male lovers; or being complicit in their own rape or for their humiliating behaviour as, naked on their hands and knees, they offer themselves to a mangy old bear. However, these three writers make no apologies for their artistic visions. Réage and Rice in particular take issue with the hegemony of "gender" feminists, who they see as anti-male, in their expressed dislike of male institutions and patriarchy, and anti-female in their desire to make women conform to a set of strict guidelines. The three writers considered here also take exception to the anti-pornography stance of the feminist agenda with its anti-sex subtext. They are completely unapologetic about their use of pornography to tell their stories, and they valorize the female imagination. Fantasy is not a hierarchical structure, and to condemn another's imagination as politically incorrect presupposes that somewhere out there is an imagination that *is* politically correct.

As Susan Sontag noted (1970), there is no subject which by its very nature should be excluded from art. In the words of Henry James , "the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision."

Chapter Two

S/M: Freedom in Captivity—Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O* and Anne Rice's *Exit to Eden*

Je veux toujours aimer, je veux toujours souffrir
Si je ne dois plus aimer, moi, je préfère mourir.
— as sung by Edith Piaf

L'effroi est notre pain de chaque jour.
— Jean Paulhan

Love seeketh only self to praise,
To bind another to its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.

Cruelty has a human heart,
And Jealousy a human face;
Terror the human form divine
and Secrecy the human dress.
— William Blake, "Songs of Experience"

Introduction

It is not only sex researchers who have long been aware of the intricate, symbiotic relationship between pain and pleasure: the world's artists and religious zealots have known about this phenomenon for years. Indeed, the relationship between these two sensations would tend to suggest that rather than being opposite states, they are points on the same emotional continuum, and that the demarcation between them is at best hazy. From the American pop song that cries out, "Hurts so good. Come on baby, make it hurt so good," to the village in the Philippines where, every year during Easter, Christian devotees willingly have themselves crucified in imitation of and homage to Jesus Christ, physical pain frequently meets a higher calling, whether it be as the delightful agony of love or the emotional excess of religious fervor. The notion of pleasure derived from pain, be it one's own pain or the pain of others, is known as sado-masochism, and though visual and aural images of sado-masochism abound in this culture, it is still nevertheless generally met with an admixture of alarm, fascination and repugnance. North American society is made very jittery by the very idea of sado-masochism and even more so by the contention that love or sex can be related to pain or violence: love is supposed to be the great panacea to all our problems, and violence the great evil that threatens to tear our world apart. We live in a society which displays strongly conflicting attitudes towards sexuality, a society that constantly titillates but then punishes us for assuaging desire; that denies and suppresses the powerful motivating force of sexuality; that equates much of sexuality with ugliness and shame; and that purports to be based on notions of freedom but demands a disconcerting amount of conformity. We hear daily stories about "sexual predators" and see distressing cases of neighbourhood witch hunts which invariably arise when a known sex-offender moves into a region. The police force has a sexual crimes unit and in some North American cities, Edmonton included, men who are convicted of approaching a prostitute for sex are sent to a "John" school, for rehabilitation and to have some righteous shame instilled into them. Nevertheless, despite the essentially sex-negative and puritanical nature of this culture, the power of sexuality as a motivating force can hardly be overestimated. That power, when suppressed, can manifest itself in many ways.

The following chapter provides a brief overview of the evolution and history of the psycho-sexual phenomenon known as sado-masochism (s/m). The chapter also examines two works of literature by female writers who are unapologetic and unselfconscious about their interest in sado-masochism. The first, *Histoire d'O* by the pseudonymous French novelist Pauline Réage was notable not only for its serious treatment of s/m, outrageous in the 1950s, but also because its author was a female. Pornographic writing in the West had up until that point (1954) seemed to be almost exclusively the domain of male writers. The second novel, Anne Rice's *Exit to Eden*, is a more contemporary treatment of s/m.

Part 1

A Brief Overview of Sado-Masochism

> The face of a lover is an unknown, precisely because it is invested with so much of oneself. It is a mystery, containing, like all mysteries, the possibility of torment.
> — James Baldwin

> Instead of feeling that men are inferior, I believe they deserve to be disciplined and dominated for being so rude in the past to women. On another level, I feel like I'm acting as a form of therapist. . . . A lot of the men who see me are important with heavy responsibilities for making a lot of difficult decisions. They come to see me so that they can release some of the pressure and tension . . .
> — Mistress Rose, professional Dominatrix

Like the term "pornography" itself, academic study and discourses on human sexuality are relatively recent phenomena. Michel Foucault identifies the 18th century as the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of a bourgeois society, yet paradoxically, an age that also marked the beginning of a veritable explosion of discourses about sex. According to Foucault, from the 18th century onwards, there was a proliferation and multiplication of sexual discourses, and an almost determined effort on the part of institutional agencies to hear it talked about (Foucault 1978, 19). Foucault traces this in part to the legacy of the Counter-Reformation and the resulting Inquisition which required stringent and minute acts of self-examination and which also stressed the sinfulness not only of the flesh, but of thoughts, desires and imagination. All of this sinfulness was expiated by the act of confession and the guidance of penance (p 19). Discourse about sex, then, instead of being suppressed was instead promoted as a means to control sexual desires, to tame the dark, sensual forces which bourgeois society had always suspected were just beneath the surface. Importantly, this sexual discourse took on a transformational character. Not only were people expected to confess to acts contravening the law, they also had to transform every desire into discourse (p 21). According to Foucault, Western culture, after several centuries of being drawn or cajoled into engaging in sexual discourse, has experienced the opposite of censorship—the establishment of practices and apparatus for producing even greater quantities of discourse about sex. For him, the beginning of the 18th century marked the emergence of a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk abut sex, to analyze it, take stock of it, classify it and quantify it (p 23). This new discourse demanded a pronouncement on sex based not only on morality, but, in the spirit of the rising star of empirical science, on rationality as well.

> One had to speak of sex; one had to speak publicly and in a manner that was not determined by the division between licit and illicit . . . one had to speak of it as a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses. In the eighteenth century, sex became a "police" matter—in the full and strict sense given the term at the time: not the repression of disorder, but an ordered maximization of collective and individual forces. . . . A policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through the useful and public discourses. (p 24-25)

Minute examinations of sex were also performed by the medical establishment. Indeed, it was the 1800s that saw the rise of sexology as a medical and psychological discipline, and the classification of sexuality that deviated from the norm as psychopathology. In 1885, the medical forensic specialist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his work *Psychopathia Sexualis* first coined the terms sadism and masochism.[9] The term sadism is derived from the infamous Marquis de Sade, a French nobleman and writer, whose novels described scenes of torture, beatings and outrageous cruelty. Krafft-Ebing defined sadism as "the creation of sexual pleasures in one's self through acts of cruelty or bodily punishment inflicted upon others, observed as being inflicted upon others or even at time inflicted upon oneself" (cited in Bullough 1983, 9). The term masochism was also named after another literary man, the historian and minor novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836-1895) whose 1870 novel *Venus in Furs* depicted the sexual adventures of a man and his cruel, whip-wielding mistress. As Bullough notes in his preface to *Studies in Sado-Masochism*, after the publication of Krafft-Ebing's work, "behaviour was defined to fit into the definitions, and what might have been regarded as merely eccentric behaviour became a psychopathology" (p 9).

Havelock Ellis, in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, (1903) agreed that sadism and masochism were linked, but he saw them as complementary emotional states, rather than opposed ones. Ellis was the first researcher to introduce what may have seemed a very incongruous term into the s/m equation—love. According to Ellis:

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[9] The appearance of Kraff-Ebing's monumental work marks the kind of attitude toward sex and sexuality that has come to be seen as the norm in our time and which was discussed above in Chapter 1—the incessant, almost obsessive cataloguing and quantification of things sexual.

> When we understand that it is pain only, and not cruelty, that is the essential in this group of manifestations we begin to come nearer to their explanation. The masochist desires to experience pain, but he generally desires that it should be inflicted in love; the sadist desires to inflict pain, but in some cases, if not in most, he desires that it should be felt as love.
>
> (cited in Weinberg and Kamel 1973, 19)

Ellis goes on to add that, for sadists, pleasure in pain is limited to sexual situations; however, at the same time that the sadist derives pleasure from pain, he is also concerned with the pleasure of the "victim" (p 19). As Thomas Weinberg and Levi Kamel note, though, the very use of the word "victim" shows that Ellis, in their view, misunderstands the essential nature of the s/m relationship. For these two researchers, the heart of the s/m relationship is not pain, but the notion of control, and the various permutations thereof; that is, dominance and submission (p 20).

Freud also wrote extensively on s/m. He remarked that most men's sexuality exists of a mixture of aggression and the desire to overcome the object of desire. Like Krafft-Ebing, Freud related sadism to atavistic male sexuality and felt that sadism and masochism were two sides of the same coin, often existing in the body of one person. Initially Freud considered masochism a true perversion, but eventually he revised his beliefs and came to construct a theory that could account for and incorporate the phenomenon: universal masochism. According to this theory, all human beings have a normal tendency toward self-destruction. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud expanded his theory to propose the existence of two primary instincts: the sexual urge (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos), and he posited that the creative and constructive tendencies of the former are in constant struggle with the destructive tendencies of the latter.

The close link between sexuality and religious ecstasy/suffering has long been recognized. Theodore Reik in his 1941 work, *Masochism in Sex and Society*, discusses the parallels between the essentially masochistic nature of Christianity, with its bleeding, tortured, scantily clad Jesus symbolizing the ultimate in surrender, and the practice of s/m which is ritualized and highly scripted (Mass 1973, 49). Just as we know Jesus' fate from the beginning, for it was decreed by God that he would sacrifice his only son to save mankind, most s/m scenarios are likewise premeditated and their outcome pre-ordained; it is in the playing-out of acts leading to an already foregone conclusion that pleasure is derived. In a more recent vein, the work of researchers Masters and Johnson during the 1970s stressed the important connection between organized religion, its associated moralities and cultural identity, and crippled sexuality. "There is no question about it. Unequivocally, absolutely, religious orthodoxy (whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant) is responsible for a significant degree of sexual dysfunction" (cited in Mass, p 55).

Interestingly, it was an anthropologist and one-time acting director of the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, who first situated s/m in a cultural context, thus freeing it from previous theories based on physiology and liberating it to a certain degree from the stigma of psychopathology. For Paul Gebhard, s/m is embedded in our culture, which operates on the basis of dominance/submission relationships and the valorization of aggression. Certainly these two assertions would meet little argument: to the extent that all relationships, non-sexual ones included, involve a balancing of power, an emotional give and take, they can be said to be dominant/submissive. As Gebhard notes, even gender is constructed to conform to a certain framework sympathetic to a sado-masochistic structure, with the traditionally dominant male and the reluctant or submissive female (cited in Weinberg and Kamel 1973, 20). And we need no further proof than the movie-of-the-week or the events related on the nightly news to see the validity of Gebhard's second point: the images and ethics of violence and aggression are lauded and romanticized in all sorts of forms in both popular culture (the genre of the Western, for example) and high culture (many operas are full of intrigue and murder) and in the events of daily life as reflected in news media.

Weinberg and Kamel discuss the four features of s/m identified by Gebhard as relevant to understanding s/m as a social phenomenon (p 21): it occurs primarily in literate societies; it has a highly symbolic nature; interaction and context (social milieu) are extremely important; finally, most s/m scenarios are highly scripted. This very last point reveals an important feature of s/m—its frequent emphasis on imagination and fantasy, and, as an ancillary characteristic, its usually consensual nature. If we accept Gebhard's four features identifying s/m as a social phenomenon, then it is clear that a study of s/m is more than an examination of deviance and perversion. On a microcosmic level, s/m perhaps reflects certain features of the culture at large and s/m's playing-out of opposite roles—femininity vs masculinity, dominance vs submission, aggression vs passivity—can possibly shed light on these roles as they exist in society at large.

In their 1973 work, *S&M: The Last Taboo*, Gerald and Caroline Green tackle at book-length the genesis, structure, practice and significance of the s/m experience. In a discussion of the Marquis de Sade, they note that Sade's goal was to make mankind recognize its essential nature, and the relationship of that nature to pleasure. According to Sade, man is in love with pleasure; pleasure is produced by sensations. Ecstasy and pain, which borders on pleasure, can therefore easily cohabitate. Despite the fact that Sade's life was far less exciting than his books, he was nevertheless punished and imprisoned for many years for relatively minor sexual excesses; excesses which cannot even come close to those depicted in his books. Indeed, his own reality was far different from his fictive world. The Greens hypothesize that Sade used sado-masochism in an attempt to redeem and transvalue the deficiency of his own world. They point to the usefulness of s/m as a medium to assist in this aesthetic transcendence, in which the lover's relation to his beloved is that of an artist to his work (Green and Green 1973, 91). S/m therefore takes on a transformative function that allows the actors in the s/m scenario to show themselves in their most exposed and vulnerable state.

Mass (1979) suggests that the sexual connection between pain and pleasure may actually be biological as opposed to psychological or cultural. He notes the then-recent discovery of endorphins, naturally produced opiate-like substances, that cause an indifference to physical and mental suffering and engender a sense of well-being.

> These substances are released in the brain and throughout the central nervous system in response to various stresses and noxious or painful stimuli. They are believed to be the mechanism responsible for pain relief in acupuncture and may be what stimulates the ecstasies so often described by religious flagellants and martyrs. (p 53)

Some researchers, however, are very virulent in their negative assessments of sexual activities like sado-masochism. Mass notes in particular the condemnations of Dr. Charles Socarides who considers s/m at best, as "brute emotion"; at worst, lower and farther back in the primitive past to sheer hedonistic pleasure (cited in Mass 1979, 56). Yet, as Mass counter-argues, if we never regress to brute emotion, thought or sheer hedonism, what happens to these urges? Contrary to Socarides and the followers of Rousseau with his notions of the noble savage and the corrupting influence of civilization, for Mass, brute emotions are innate and have to be dealt with, and he sees the value of s/m in this process of domestication.

In summation, despite certain re-assessments of s/m and the fact that Hollywood has made a mainstream movie featuring s/m, we must be careful not to view the assessment of s/m on the part of either psychiatry or sexual research as essentially favourable or to consider s/m part of mainstream sexual practices. While many see the value of s/m and consider it a relatively harmless activity, others view it as much more pernicious. Mass describes the modern psychiatric profession as being Janus-faced about sado-masochism:

> On the one hand, moral and sexual sadomasochistic patterns are regularly and confidently analyzed through oedipal microscopes. On the other, there are sometimes vague, fleeting concessions to the existence of a primary constitutional masochism. (p 55)

However, as with most forms of human behaviour, things are not easily reduced to simple cause and effect solutions. As white-coat-clad researchers gaze through their "oedipal microscopes" and make lists of apparently endless examples of aberrant behaviour, attach electrodes to monkeys' nipples to measure sexual responses, conduct experiment after experiment on undergraduate psychology students, many artists seem to feel that sexuality is relatively immune to the probes of empirical science and that art is, in certain ways, no more or no less than a form of consciousness. They therefore go quietly about their business, secure in their belief, as Henry James put it, that the "province of art is all life" and thus that all that is human is meant to be talked about.

Part 2

Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O*—The Story of *Story of O*

I found in the pain and even in the shame a blend of sensuality that left me craving
rather than fearing to feel again from the same hand.
— Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The publication in France in 1954 of *Histoire d'O (Story of O)* was both a noteworthy and a curious event. The pseudonymous author of the work, a certain Pauline Réage, was completely unheard of and in the somewhat incestuous French literary world, the publication of a new novel by a complete unknown caused quite a stir. To add to the consternation, *Histoire d'O* was about a young woman's sado-masochistic experiences and was replete with impassively told, detailed descriptions of her acquiescence to torture, beatings and sexual assault at the hands of many different men.[10] However, *O* was not a sleazy, pornographic thriller designed to appeal to the basest of tastes: *O* was clearly literary, and in fact, contained a laudatory preface by Jean Paulhan, a prominent writer, intellectual and member of the Académie Française. *Histoire d'O* caused mixed reactions: in some circles, it was seen as an anachronism, a testosterone-overloaded male fantasy, particularly troubling in a time when the seeds of modern French feminist thought were being sown; in some circles it was seen as a literary hoax and there were questions, still unanswered today, as to the real identity of Pauline Réage. Was this a pseudonym of an established author testing new waters or perhaps playing an elaborate joke, or was this unusual work the brainchild of a new presence on the literary scene? The answer to the real identity and purpose of Pauline Réage is provided by writer John de St Jorre, who chronicled the fascinating story of the genesis and life of *Histoire d'O* in a recently published work entitled *The Good Ship Venus: the Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press*. According to a personal interview with the woman de St Jorre identifies as Pauline Réage, *Histoire d'O* was originally written, not with the intention of publication, but as a love letter and homage by a woman fearful of losing her lover. The woman, as de St Jorre reveals, is Dominique Aury, a journalist, editor, translator and a respected woman of letters; the lover was Jean Paulhan himself whom Aury had met during WWII and with whom she had sustained a long-lived if unconventional relationship for over 30 years. It was when Aury was in her mid-forties and afraid that Paulhan was going to desert her for a younger woman that she conceived the idea of writing *O*. Her reasoning was simple: "What could I do? I couldn't paint, I couldn't write poetry. What could I do to make him sit up?" (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 211). Apparently, Paulhan loved *O* from its opening words and encouraged Aury every step of the way. He offered editorial advice, but did not change a single comma, with the exception of the removal of the adjective "sacrificiel" (p 215). It was Paulhan who first took *Histoire d'O* to Gaston Gallimard of Gallimard Press with the aim of publication. Gallimard turned him down, fearing a scandal. Next, he approached André Defez of Les Deux Rives Press, who first accepted it, but later reneged because he was in the middle of a legal battle with the French government over a recently published book critical of French policy in

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[10] The omission of the definite article in French implies a mock-innocence, "histoire de" being idiomatic for "nothing but a story" or "just one of those stories" (Brown and Faery 1987, 192).

Indochina; he was in no mood to take on another book that might elicit more legal hassles. Finally, Paulhan took *O* to writer and publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert, who declared it a masterpiece. Pauvert accepted *O* at once, along with the foreword by Paulhan ("Du Bonheur dans l'Esclavage"). Pauvert also discussed the book with Maurice Girodias of the notorious Olympia Press. Girodias immediately became interested in publishing an English language version of the novel concurrent with the French one.

Initially, critical reception of *Histoire d'O* was favourable, and the book was particularly admired by well-known writers such as Georges Bataille and André Pieyre de Mandiargues. Copies of *O* freely circulated in French literary circles where the intensely sexual work, replete with disturbing details of bondage and beatings, did not seem to scandalize the sophisticated and worldly readership. However, as word about the novel spread into the public domain, the government, fearing the effect of the troubling erotic content, alerted the forces of the state, and the police were called in to action. Thus, the year following its publication, despite or perhaps because of the notoriety surrounding the awarding of the Prix de Deux Magots to *Histoire d'O*, the police questioned both Pauvert and Girodias, who stalwartly refused to identify the author.[11] In 1954, at the height of the furor over *Histoire d'O*, the Book Committee issued the following proclamation:

> Considérant que ce livre publié par l'éditeur Jean-Jacques Pauvert entend retracer les aventures d'une jeune femme qui, pour complaire à son amant, se soumet à tous les caprices érotiques et à tous les sévices.
> Considérant que ce livre violemment et consciemment immoral, où les scènes de débauches à deux ou plusiers personnages alternent avec des scènes de cruautès sexuelles, contient un ferment détestable et condamnable, et que par la même il outrage les bonnes moeurs.
> Emet l'avis qu'il y a lieu à poursuites. (cited in Deforges 1979, 16)

Legal action began. Paulhan's lawyer was assigned to defend Aury who insisted on her right to anonymity. However, just as quickly as it began, the legal action was stopped by order of the Minister of Justice and the furor surrounding *O* abated. Dominique Aury surmises that her friendship with the mistress of the Minister of Justice was instrumental in the cessation of police attention to *O* (de St Jorre 1994, 220).

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[11] Persecution was nothing new to either man, Pauvert having been involved in a series of court cases for years relating to his publication of the entirety of the works of the Marquis de Sade. Girodias, too, had been battling the censors for years over such books as Nabokov's *Lolita*, Terry Southern's *Candy*, and *The Ginger Man* by J.P. Donleavy, to name but a few.

Meanwhile, the English language publication of the work was fraught with wrangling between Pauvert and Girodias over copyright and translation issues. The first translation that Girodias commissioned was a rather shameless three-week rush job the purpose of which was purely temporal—Girodias wanted it ready in time to be released with the French edition. The lack of artistry, however, did not deter the French police from raiding Girodias' headquarters on rue de Nesle in Paris, a raid which Girodias blamed on Pauvert. Pauvert indignantly denied the charge, "He was completely crazy, the poor fellow, he was drinking far too much at that time" (cited in de St Jorre, 220). The second translation of *O* was completed by a certain Austryn Wainhouse, a member of the stable of translators working for Girodias in Paris at the time. Wainhouse reveals that Girodias knew that the first translation was terrible, fit perhaps only for sailors (p 220) and wanted another, better one.[12]

Girodias encountered his own legal troubles when the Vice Squad ordered a number of the English editions of *O* seized. However, the book was never officially banned and eventually the police seemed to lose interest in it altogether (p 221).Then, in 1963, Pauvert sold the foreign language publication rights to Barney Rosset of Grove Press in New York. Rosset commissioned a third, and definitive, translation by a certain Sabine d'Estrée. The Grove Press edition of *O* contains a translator's foreword in which Mme. d'Estrée pleads the need for a female translator for *O*:

> *Histoire d'O*, written by a woman, demands a woman translator, one who will humble herself before the work and be satisfied simply to render it, as faithfully as possible, without interpretation or unwanted elaboration. Faced with a work such as *O*, male pride, male superiority—however liberal the male, however much he may try to suppress them—will, I am certain, somehow intrude.
> (Réage 1965, xii)

However much the translator might protest, however, St Jorre suspects that these words were uttered ironically; according to him the indispensable "female" translator Sabine d'Estrée is also a pseudonym and in reality is "almost certainly the unmistakably masculine figure of Richard Seaver" (de St Jorre 1994, 223), a well-known professional translator living in Paris at the time. However, Seaver denies his role in the subterfuge and the true identity of the American translator responsible for the definitive English language version of *Story of O* is unknown to this day.

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[12] Despite this however, Girodias had Wainhouse change the name of the novel to *The Wisdom of the Lash*, in an attempt to appeal to a broader (if baser) clientele. Pauvert was furious not only because of the decided slight to the literary quality of *O*, but also because Girodias had rights for only one English-language publication.

O's reception in the U.S. was, perhaps surprisingly, favourable: de St Jorre cites a *Newsweek* review which summed up *Story of O* as "an ironic fable of unfreedom, a mystic document that transcends the pornographic and even the erotic . . . " (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 223) and the influential and important *New York Times Book Review* commented on *O's* disturbing power:

> Aiming only to reveal, to clarify, to make real to the reader those dark and repulsive practices and emotions that the better self rejects as improbable or evil, Pauline Réage succeeds in drawing us irresistibly into her perverse world through the magnetism of her own selfless absorption in it. (ibid, p 223)

Réage eventually wrote a final chapter for *Histoire d'O* entitled *Retour à Roissy* which describes the degradation and unhappy fate of O. *Retour* is a pale imitation of *O* and lacks the latter's grace and commitment to its subject. Réage describes *Retour* as "the other side of the dream . . . une fabrication mauvaise" (cited in de St. Jorre 1994, 224) and insisted on its suppression. Both Pauvert and Paulhan agreed that *Histoire d'O* stood nicely on its own, and that *Retour* lacked the control and beauty of *Histoire*. They felt that it read "like something out of a spy novel" (p 224) and both agreed that it should be suppressed. Nevertheless, in 1969, Pauvert published *Retour à Roissy* along with another work by Réage entitled *Une Fille Amoureuse*, a short, almost musing piece that describes the genesis of *Histoire d'O* and explains who the characters in the novel were modelled on. This joint publication was a money-making scheme on the part of Pauvert who was in financial difficulty at the time and who felt that he might be able to capitalize on the former infamy of the novel. Réage virtually disclaims any responsibility for *Retour à Roissy* as revealed by the following text which precedes the work:

> The pages that follow are a sequel to *Story of O*. They deliberately suggest the degradation of that work and cannot under any circumstances be integrated into it. (Réage 1971, 25)

In 1974, a film version of *O* was made and sales of the book again soared, despite the fact that Réage felt that the film was "abominable" and Paulhan tersely stated, "It was a stupid film" (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 225). The sudden reappearance of *O* reignited public interest in the story, however; *L'Express*, the major weekly news magazine in France, published a cover story about the film as well as excerpts from the novel, the book was released in paperback and appeared in a book-club edition. With the sudden reawakening of interest in *Histoire d'O*, Aury was persuaded to do two interviews; the first was a short, candid interview published in *Elle* magazine in 1974; the second, a book length interview with Régine Deforges, a French journalist and writer, entitled *O M'a Dit* and published in 1975 (published in the U.S. as *Confessions of O* in 1979). In her 1974 *Elle* magazine interview, Réage discusses the difference in spirit between *Histoire d'O* and the decidedly down-market *Retour à Roissy*:

> I wanted to break (O's) world of fantasy, to see what was happening, to see if the story was becoming real. . . . It was a good way to show that the realization of a fantasy can only be disappointing. (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 226)

However, that is not the end of the story: the cycle of subterfuge continues even today, for as de St Jorre next reveals, Dominique Aury is itself a pseudonym. Although he claims to know the true identity of Aury, he states "She asked me not to reveal it, or the details of her family, and this I agreed to do" (de St Jorre 1994, 231). There is, however, something curious about all of this. Dominique Aury was a well-known editor and translator in Paris at the time. Indeed, she and Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues (who wrote an introductory essay for *O*), along with many others, were the editors of *Ecrivains d'aujourd'hui: Dictionnaire anthologique et critique 1940-60* which was published in Paris in 1960. Curiously, despite the fact that *Histoire d'O* won a major literary prize, the name Pauline Réage does not appear in the anthology.

To complicate matters even further, de St Jorre notes that there are still those who doubt the authenticity of Réage/Aury's claims to the authorship of *O*. He cites in particular Dr. Eric John Dingwall, curator of the Private Case, the famous collection of erotica of the British Museum, who believed fervently that *O* was written by a man (p 232). De St Jorre goes on to delineate two groups of "doubters." The first are those who were in Paris at the time of publication and were closely connected to its production; the second are the scholars and bibliophiles who have specialized in studies of this and other erotic novels and who hold very strong opinions about the origins of the work. Richard Seaver, whom de St Jorre has identified as Sabine d'Estrée, the American translator of *O*, claims that someone other than Aury was involved in the writing of *O*. Further, de St Jorre cites Clifford Scheiner of C.J. Scheiner in New York, a well-known collector and connoisseur of erotica who believes that *O* was written by a group of people, including Paulhan and Pauvert.[13]

In 1993, a new translation of *O* by John Paul Hand for Book of the Month appeared in the U.S. This particular edition, which was "specially created," is a competent and artful one, but the cover gives one pause. The first edition of *Histoire d'O* in 1954 was a plain yellow, with the title appearing in two colours. Some copies featured a small medallion-sized lithograph by Hans Bellmer, an Austrian painter. "It was a beautiful book," Pauvert said, "everything was done with great care" (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 216). The new, 1993 translation appears in paperback with a cover which, while decidedly not as tawdry as Girodias at his most egregious, nevertheless, probably would make Réage/Aury cringe. It is brightly coloured and features a cartoonish, dark haired woman looking slyly at a mustachioed, trench coat clad man with a blob on his finger that is meant to be the special Roissy ring. This cover borders on the campy, and while many adjectives have been applied to the *Histoire d'O*, "campy" has never been one of them. Such a cover clearly belies the dark and somber tale within and one can only imagine how curious but unprepared readers might react.

In the end, the true identity of Pauline Réage remains both a point of contention and a mystery. However, all other possible authors have faded away or died, and those who could reveal more are clearly unwilling to do so. Therefore, it seems logical and fair to stop dwelling on this matter and let Pauline Réage/Dominique Aury remain the acknowledged author of *Histoire d'O*.

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[13] As an interesting sidenote, in 1956, a book called *L'Image*, by another anonymous author (Jean de Berg) was published in Paris with a preface signed P.R., presumably referring to Pauline Réage. *L'Image* also centres on a sado-masochistic relationship, and while not as dense or thoughtful as *O*, nevertheless deals with the themes of identity and sacrifice so artfully accomplished in *O*. It is rumoured, and generally accepted by most sources, that the author of *L'Image* was Catherine, the wife of nouveau roman French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet. De St. Jorre recalls that when he asked Aury about the signed preface, she said that Alain Robbe-Grillet himself had written it and then signed P.R. as a joke (St. Jorre, 233).

The Body of *O*

Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ton chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et, vertigineuse douceur!
A travers ces lèvres nouvelles,
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T'infuser mon venin, ma soeur!
— *Baudelaire, "A Celle Qui Est Trop Gaie"*

Histoire d'O is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, *Les Amants de Roissy*, we meet O who is seated in a car with her lover René. When they arrive at their destination, he tells her to go inside and do whatever she is told. O complies and is ushered into the exclusive resort of Roissy where she is stripped and fitted for shackles, a leather collar and bracelet. Completely naked except for these accoutrements and a long flowing cape, she is led to the library, where four men, including René, await her. She is blindfolded and sexually assaulted, then tied up and savagely whipped. After the blindfold is removed, the rules of Roissy are explained to her: she is to be a female slave, always ready to do the bidding of her masters; she must never look anyone in the eye; she must never close her lips, her legs, or her knees in the presence of her male masters; she must not wear any kind of clothing that does not easily open from the front, even when she returns to her "real" life. She has in effect lost all personal privacy and proprietorship of her own body. As an acknowledgment of her sacrifice, her lover René draws her aside and professes his true love for her. At this point, O realizes that something transcendent has happened to her: the centre of her being, the very essence of who and what she is has been called into question, as has the very legitimacy of her existence. Her centre has shifted, and she realizes that she is now totally dedicated to something outside herself.

After her ordeal, she is taken back to what will be her room for the next several months where a sadistic hired hand named Pierre chains her and whips her once again.

Thus begins *Histoire d'O.*

The rest of the first chapter describes in detail the course of O's life at Roissy, with its daily rounds of whippings, beatings and intercourse, interspersed by almost absolution-like times when she is cleaned, massaged and oiled and treated much like a prized race horse. This existence infuses O with a sense of liberation.

> Rien cependent qui lui ait été d'autant de secours que le silence, sinon les chaînes. Les chaînes et le silence, qui auraient dû la ligoter au fond d'elle-même, l'étouffer, l'étrangler, tout au contraire la délivraient d'elle-même. (p 47)

O's self-inflicted enslavement assumes a religious nature: she feels herself the "le réceptacle d'impureté, l'égout dont parle l'Écriture" (p 54). Almost like a mediaeval sin-eater, she takes in and subdues the sexuality of her lover and others, she suffers their beatings willingly and find release and pleasure in their complementary roles. At the end of a month characterized by beating upon beating, René comes to take her home. Before she leaves, she is given an iron ring bearing a special symbol peculiar to Roissy; thus, wherever she is, any member of Roissy may recognize her and she is obliged to obey his every command.

In Chapter 2, entitled *Sir Stephen*, we see O in her "normal" life as a fashion photographer as she resumes her regular, daily routine. However little her outward life seems to have changed, though, her psyche has clearly been altered; she is no longer free in the normal sense of the word. Although she is at liberty to abandon both the course she has chosen and quit both Roissy and René, her love for him is the prison that binds her to him inexorably.

> Elle l'écoutait sans mot dire, songeant qu'elle était bien heureuse qu'il voulût se prouver, peu import comment, qu'elle lui appartenait, et aussi qu'il n'était pas sans naïveté, de ne pas se rendre compte que cette appartenance était au-delà de toute épreuve. . . . Soudain il lui dit que tout d'abord il voulait que pour l'écouter elle desserrât les genoux, et dénouât les bras; car elle était assise les genoux joints et les bras noués autour des genoux. . . Le mot "ouvre" et l'expression "ouvre les jambes" se chargaient dans la bouche de son amant de tant de trouble et de pouvoir qu'elle ne les entendait jamais sans une sorte de prosternation intérieure, de soumission sacrée, comme si un dieu et non lui, avait parlé. (pp 67-68)

René introduces O to Sir Stephen, his English half-brother. O agrees to obey both René and Sir Stephen, who demand the total abdication of her will.

> . . . mais cette fois-ci, ce qu'ils voulaient d'elle n'était pas quelle obéît à un ordre, c'était qu'elle vînt au-devant des ordres, qu'elle se jugeât elle-même esclave, et se livrât pour telle . . . "Je reconnais à toi et à Sir Stephen le droit . . . " Le droit de disposer de son corps à leur gré, en quelque lieu et de quelque manière qu'il leur plût, le droit de la tenir echaînée, le droit de la fouetter comme une esclave ou comme une condamnée pour la moindre faute ou pour leur plaisir, le droit de ne pas tenir compte de ses supplications ni de ses cris, s'ils la faisaient crier.
> (pp 91-92)

O is strangely excited by the prospect of Sir Stephen exercising control over her and she tells them both "Je consens à tout ce qu'il vous plaira" (pp 94-96). She is strangely drawn to Sir Stephen, who, she feels has seen right through her and identified the source of her guilt the instant he laid eyes on her: wantonness.

> Pourtant, il était sûr qu'elle était coupable et que sans le vouloir René la punissait d'une faute qu'il ne connaissait pas (puisqu'elle restait tout intérieure) mais que Sir Stephen avait à l'instant décelée: la facilité. O était heureuse que René la fît fouetter et la prostituât parce que sa soumission passionnée donnerait à son amant la preuve de son appartenance, mais aussi parce que la douleur et la honte du fouet, et l'outrage que lui infligeaient ceux qui la contraignaient au plaisir quand ils la possédaient et tout aussi bien se complaisaient au leur sans tenir compte de sien, lui semblaient le rachat même de sa faute. . . . Et si malgré cela Sir Stephen avait raison? Alors, plus sa bassesse était grande, plus René était miséricordieux de consentir à faire d'O l'instrument de son plaisir. (pp 117-18)

With time, it is clear that O is becoming more Sir Stephen's than Rene's; with each of René's absences and with each command and beating at the hands of Sir Stephen, she moves inexorably away from René.

In Chapter 3, *Anne-Marie et Les Anneaux*, Sir Stephen takes O to the home of a certain Anne-Marie, who runs a distaff version of Roissy peopled by her own bevy of female slaves. There, O is fitted for iron bracelets and then, in a bizarre lottery, the three female slave girls draw numbers to see who will have the privilege of being the first to whip O. A small woman named Colette wins and beats O mercilessly until she screams for pity as Anne-Marie, the mistress of the house, looks on.

> Elle savait bien pourquoi Anne-Marie avait tenu, avant toute chose, à la faire fouetter. Qu'une femme fût aussi cruelle, et plus implacable qu'un homme, elle n'en avait jamais douté. Mais O pensait qu'Anne-Marie cherchait moins à manifester son pouvoir qu'à établir entre elle et O une complicité. O n'avait jamais compris, mais avait fini par reconnaître, pour une vérité indéniable, et importante, l'enchevêtrement contradictoire et constant de ses sentiments: elle aimait l'idée du

> supplice, quand elle le subissait elle aurait trahi le monde entier pour y échapper, quand il était fini elle était heureuse de l'avoir subi, d'autant plus heureuse qu'il avait été plus cruel et plus long. (p 188)

Before she leaves Anne-Marie's, her labia are pierced and a heavy iron ring on which are inscribed her and Sir Stephen's names is attached. Finally, she is tied to a table and her buttocks branded with Sir Stephen's insignia, a fact which fills her with "une fierté insensée" (p 201)

In the fourth and final chapter of *Histoire d'O*, entitled *La Chouette*, Jacqueline, O's roomate and occasional lover, notices O's chains and the welts on her back. O's explanation both repulses and fascinates Jacqueline. O has a secret plan to lure Jacqueline into her world: the two women are about to leave for a month's holiday at Sir Stephen's villa in the south of France. O plans to entice Jacqueline into her room where a trompe l'oeil latticework would allow Sir Stephen a perfect and clandestine view of their activities:

> Jacqueline serait livrée aux regards de Sir Stephen, quand O la caressait, et elle l'apprendrait trop tard pour s'en défendre. Il était doux à O de se dire que par trahison elle liverait Jacqueline, parce qu'elle se sentait insultée de voir que Jacqueline méprisait cette condition d'esclave marquée et fouettée dont O était fière. (p 215)

O and Jacqueline duly arrive at the villa in the company of Natalie, Jacqueline's little sister. O discovers that René has fallen in love with Jacqueline, but this abandonment leaves her surprisingly indifferent. Two weeks before, she had raced across town to implore René to declare his constant love for her. Now, she seems to have found everything she wants in Sir Stephen.

> Mais aussi, qu'était René auprès de Sir Stephen? Corde de foin, amarre de paille, boulets de liège, voilà de quoi les liens véritables dont il l'avait fait attacher, pour si vite y renoncer, étaient le symbole. Mais quel repos, quel délice l'anneau de fer qui troue la chair et pèse pour toujours, la marque qui ne s'effacera jamais, la main d'un maître qui vous couche sur un lit de roc, l'amour d'un maître qui sait s'approprier sans pitié ce qu'il aime. Et O se disait que finalement elle n'avait aimé René que pour apprende l'amour et mieux savoir se donner, esclave et comblée, à Sir Stephen. (p 223)

In the final scene of the novel, Sir Stephen introduces O to a man known simply as the Commander who also wears the Roissy ring. The Commander supplies a curious package: a box that contains animal masks intended to fit over the human head with spaces for eyes, nose and mouth. O tries on all the masks—sparrow-hawk, falcon, fox, lion and bull—but finds that a mask of an owl suits her the best, and transforms her the most. The next night Sir Stephen takes her to a dance hosted by the Commander. She is naked except for the owl mask and a leash connected to her labial rings and held by Natalie (who unlike her sister is fascinated and attracted to O's world). O is made to sit, naked and motionless on a bench, where she perches all night, much like the bird she is impersonating. She is a sensation. The Commander invites his guests to come and have a closer look at her. Her eyes seek out Sir Stephen's; she reassumes her vigil.

> La musique avait repris, les danseurs dansaient de nouveau. Un ou deux couples se rapprochèrent d'abord d'elle comme par hasard, en continuant à danser, puis l'un d'eux franchement, la femme entraînant l'homme. O les fixait de ses yeux cernés de bistre sous la plume, large ouverts comme les yeux de l'oiseau nocturne qu'elle figurait, et si forte était l'illusion que ce qui paraissait le plus naturel, qu'on l'interrogeât, personne n'y songeait, comme si elle eût été une vraie chevêche, sourde au langage humain, et muette. . . . on s'approcha d'elle plusieurs fois, jusqu'à la toucher, on fit cercle plusieurs fois autour d'elle, plusieurs fois on lui ouvrit les genoux, en soulevant sa chaîne, en apportant un des ces candélabres à deux branches en faïence provençale—et elle sentait la flamme des bougies lui chauffer l'intérieur des cuisses—pour voir comment sa chaîne lui était fixée. (p 242)

No one speaks to O. She maintains her silent, unmoving vigil all night. Finally, after daybreak, when everyone has left, Sir Stephen and the Commander conduct O to the middle of the courtyard, take off her mask and chain and "la renversant sur une table, la possédèrent tour à tour" (p 243).

The end of *O* is strange and ambiguous. As you read the final words and turn the page, a short passage tells you the following:

> Dans un dernier chapitre, qui a été supprimé, O retournait à Roissy, où Sir Stephen l'abandonnait.
> Il exist une seconde fin à l'histoire d'O. C'est que se voyant sur le point d'être quittée par Sir Stephen elle préferá mourir. Il y consentit. (p 245)

John de St. Jorre asked Dominique Aury about the vague ending of *O*:

> When I asked Dominique Aury about that second ending, she shrugged her shoulders, "I didn't know how to end it, so I left it open. Why not? I am not a novelist, you know." (cited in de St. Jorre 1994, 224)

The Meaning of *O*

Women exist in a special psycho-pathological state of fantasy both in reference to
themselves and to their manner of relating to their counterclass. This
pathological condition, considered the most desirable state for any woman
to find herself in, is what we know as the phenomenon of love.
— Ti-Grace Atkinson, feminist writer

Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord.
— Ephesians 5:22

Histoire d'O is a landmark work; for a while it was the best-selling and most widely read novel outside of France. It has been translated into many languages and has never been out of print. In de St. Jorre's estimation "*O* made literary history as a seminal work of erotica, opening the door to a new generation of women writers and expanding public acceptance of what could be read" (de St Jorre 1994, 210).[14] Yet, despite de St Jorre's claims, very few feminists have accepted *Histoire d'O* as a liberating, enabling work and instead have vilified it for its apparent portrayal of O's servility and abject female masochism; indeed, *Histoire d'O* would seem to stand for just about everything that the feminist movement finds odious. Feminist Robin Morgan remarks that *O* sounds like a male fantasy, not a female one (quoted in Brown and Faery 1987, 89), while Susan Brownmiller in her influential *Against Our Will* refers to *Histoire d'O* as scurrilous and says that she almost retched when she read it (Brownmiller 1975, 323).

One could argue that *Histoire d'O* betrays not even the slightest feminist sensibility. Appearing as it did before the term "feminism" became part of the vernacular, let alone a critical paradigm, Réage could be said to be simply uninformed, or, in feminist lingo, to be co-opted into her own suppression. However, Réage/Aury is clearly not a naive and inexperienced girl, unwise to the ways of the world. As a literate and cultured woman she was not only quite cognizant of the potential impact of *O*, but also of its underlying ethic. And promoting a feminist agenda was not her intention; rather, she is clearly interested in pursuing the themes of personality, sacrifice, devotion and love; to this end, she is eloquent in her own defence. To accusations that *O* is morally offensive, Réage observes that common decency and morals are offended every day by such things as concentration camps, bombs and torture and "la vie tout court offense les bonnes moeurs, à mon sens, à tout instant, et non pas spécifiquement les diverses manières de faire l'amour" (cited in Deforges 1979, 16). Réage goes on to elaborate on the very clear distinction between the world of the flesh and the world of moral strictures: she sees no connection between the two:

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[14] A second work of erotica by a female, *Emmanuelle*, by Emmanuelle Arsan, published in 1967, relates the purported sexual adventures of the wife of a diplomat in the French foreign service. *Emmanuelle* joins *O* as two of the most noteworthy works of French erotica of this century.

> Libérée de quoi? Des tabous sexuels? Mais je ne savais même pas ce que c'était, des tabous. C'était comme s'ils n'avaient jamais existé. Je ne faisais même pas le rapport avec des préceptes de l'éducation religeuse, qui s'était effondrée d'un seul coup, bien avant. Que venaient faire des interdits moraux avec le fonctionnement du corps? Je n'y pensais même pas. (cited in Deforges 1979, 19)

In a culture which habitually conflates sex and love into one unassailable social norm, *O* reflects a subversive philosophy. The character of O creates a world of an almost religious devotion not to a god, but to her community with her lovers (first Réne then Sir Stephen). For O, her personhood and whatever is essential in her being are defined by the complicated relationship between her physical sensations and her mind (or, perhaps, soul). In a strange reversal of order, O turns her ardor and her passions against her own body and her pain becomes a personal offering to her lovers. And her willingness clearly indicates that she is not a passive victim of circumstances but instead, complicit, a keen participant in and active author of her own fate. Her actions neatly mirror those of the martyrs, the excessively religious and the ascetics. Asceticism, the "voluntary denial or frustration of legitimate inclinations and impulses or the bearing of self-inflicted pain in order to attain religious perfection" (Häring 1967, 940), is practiced in virtually all religions and is a particularly important aspect of Christianity. The aims of asceticism, and O can be considered an ascetic par excellence, are atonement for sin and guilt, self-discipline, a show of utter love for God and identification with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sufferings and sacrifices of the various martyrs are numerous and well-documented. St. Teresa of Avila, in particular, was known for her profound, bordering on morbid, asceticism and her delight in the mortification (the word is from the Latin and means "to put to death") of the flesh.

> Neither does labour weary them [the nuns of her cloister], neither confinement of the cloister irk them, nor sickness sadden them, nor does death affright or dismay them, but rather rejoice and cheer. The greatest marvel is the goodwill with which they do that which is hardest. Mortification is their delight, and resignation a sport, the harshness of penance a pastime, and they have turned the exercise of the heroic virtue to a pleasant diversion. (cited in Clarke 1968, 276)

As de Mandiargues observes, erotic literature despite its subject of sensuality nevertheless tends toward the moralistic: it espouses and justifies a sensual and voluptuous approach to life or, alternatively, tries to expose the moral standards of the day as empty and constricting (cited in Réage 1954, xvii). However, in *Histoire d'O*, despite the intensely sexual nature of O's experiences, Pauline Réage manages to skirt moral issues. Indeed, there is an almost complete lack of moral censure in the novel. O knows that the rest of the world would not understand her behaviour, so she is silent at work and tells no one of her activities. Her silence is not a matter of shame: she is simply realistic enough to realize that her behaviour is aberrant and would upset if not disgust most people. Yet, she herself feels no shame and indeed, with time, begins to feel very proud as shown by the way she wears Sir Stephen's irons. Conventional morality is essentially peripheral in *O*; instead, the story concentrates on the evolution and eventual destruction of O's personality, and the fact that that destruction is self-willed acts as a form of religious-like absolution for both the characters and the author.

However, given the nature of the events in the novel, this refusal to take a moral stance, O's ready acceptance of her humiliation and degradation and her shocking desire for pain and annihilation can be hard pills to swallow, especially for contemporary females, the inheritors of feminism as a political movement and a guiding ethic. Feminists who revile *O* see nothing socially redeeming or liberating in the story, and the fact that it was written by a woman does not mitigate its message, since it then is clear that the author has either a false or a pernicious consciousness. However, even feminist critics who condemn the story on a literal level can find a seed of redemption when *O* is viewed as moral allegory. For critics Nathaniel Brown and Rebecca Blevins Faery, O's abdication of self is a graphic illustration of the essential role that females play in a patriarchy: they are not seen as full human beings with proprietary rights over their own bodies; their proper place is as slaves, forever at the beck and call of male masters; they are sexual objects to be used solely for the gratification of male desire. For these two critics, the moral of *Histoire d'O* is insidious and regressive; *O* is a metaphor of marriage in a patriarchal society, and therefore, a tale with application in the real world. Viewed in this light, *O* becomes a feminist cautionary tale (Brown and Faery 1987, 191).

> If what O allows to be enacted on herself in the novel is allegorically parallel to what women voluntarily embrace in traditional patriarchal marriage, then the novel possesses a powerfully consciousness-raising potential, awakening women to the true nature of patriarchal marriage. (p 192)

Seen in this light, every event in the novel can be a paradigm for traditional forms of social organization in a culture dominated by a patriarchy. The chateau of Roissy ("roi" is French for king), in its Sadean darkness and isolation, stands for the abode of the male, the castle where he is king. The treatment which O undergoes there represents her erotic dreams and fantasies and her desire to please her lover based on the emotion that has been the single most major cause of female oppression in history: love. Love itself becomes the force that undermines O's independence and transforms her into a sexual and psychological slave. From the minute that O succumbs to her love for René, she is "on the road to nothingness and death" (p 194). O's freedom is a farce—she knows that if she were to leave Roissy, as she is continually assured she can do, she will lose the sustaining force of her life: René's love. The duties that O is made to complete at Roissy—sweeping, arranging flowers, waiting on tables—show that, aside from the traditional sexual role, she is also to play the traditional role of housewife. The privileged place of the male at Roissy reveals a biologically motivated given in a patriarchal culture—the physical inferiority of the female. At Roissy, the women are never to wear anything that conceals their sex, and they must always train their eyes on the genital area of the men, for "there resides their true master." Thus, the woman is always reminded of her biological lack, in Freudian terms, of her castration (p 196). And not only are the women at Roissy biologically inferior to males, they are also spiritually inferior. O repeatedly refers to René as a god and she prays for him not to leave her. Her total submission at Roissy, however, assures her of his continuing interest in her and she leaves there wearing the classic symbol of traditional bondage in a patriarchal society: a ring. However, in a perversion of the normal servitude symbolized by the ring, she is bound not only to her "husband," she is also bound to any and all who wear the ring. She is called upon many times to prove her love for René by submitting to other men, almost always in his presence.

What follows after O's departure from Roissy is her deliverance to a new and more formidable master. "It is important to the development of the story's symbolism that we see Sir Stephen as not literally a new man in O's life, but as a continuation, a transmutation, of her original lover" (Brown and Faery 1987, 199). The more Sir Stephen beats her, the happier she is to bear the stigmata of her wounds. In a strange quasi-religious ceremony at Samois, the residence of Anne Marie, O's labia are pierced by rings on which are inscribed her and Sir Stephen's names, thus signifying the "final assimilation and internalization of her condition in the married state" (p 200). O continues to address Sir Stephen with the formal "vous," while he addresses her with the familiar "tu" further emphasizing her inferior and infantalized role. At the end of the novel we meet The Commander, whom Brown and Faery identify as a "glimpse into the future, the final permutation of O's 'master', now middle aged, balding, paunchy whose only interest in his wife is utilitarian" (p 203). The mask that The Commander brings becomes the final emblem of O's descent into nothingness. Masked as an owl, O is little more than a captured pet.

> The idealized image of the woman who glories in her submission to the male is patriarchal society's most powerful weapon in perpetuating the system of sexual inequality, just as the mythic figure of the "happy slave" was a prop in the perpetuation of the institution of slavery in the ante-bellum South (a parallel allegorized in the novel through the figure of Sir Stephen's mulatto maid, Norah, who in the absence of her master administers O's floggings). (p 204)

For Brown and Faery, it is love that drives O to her abject state, to a point of such nullity, that she might as well not even exist; and it is patriarchy that sells the big lie, romantic love, as the road to true happiness for women. Unfortunately, most women fail to read the fine print, which states that the ecstasy of love will be met, measure for measure, with loss of selfhood. By immersing herself in her love for her husband, a woman becomes little more than a mere appendage. Love, just like pornography, becomes a cultural tool that men use to conquer women and maintain their power over them. Romantic love, while selling images of security and happiness is, in reality, a Sadean nightmare (p 206).

This invocation of the Marquis de Sade as part of Brown and Faery's potent, anti-male discursive analysis demands an answer. Any mention of Sade tends to immediately conjure up his overwrought public image as a feckless debaucher and a morally bankrupt dissolute. Yet, although Sade was in a sense the first well-known "pornographer," he did not promote unbridled sexual license or cruelty. Rather, Sade used the medium of sex to explore human nature and the nature of power relationships both personal, political and religious. Essentially Sade, though reviled by many, is a moralist (although a moralist on his own terms) and was even considered to have ideas regarding the equality of women that were far before his time. It is in this light that Réage mentions Sade in *Une Fille Amoureuse*, as she discusses the multi-facetedness of the personality, and the paradoxical relationship between captivity and freedom:

> But Sade made me understand that we are all jailers, and all in prison, in that there is always someone within us whom we enchain, whom we imprison, whom we silence. By a curious kind of reverse shock, it can happen that prison itself can open the gates to freedom. The stone walls of a cell, the solitude, but also the night, the solitude, again the solitude, the warmth of the sheets, the silence, free this unknown creature whom we have kept locked up. It escapes us and escapes endlessly, through the walls, the ages, the interdictions. It passed from one to the other, from one age to another, from one country to another, it assumes one name or another. Those who speak its name are merely translators who, without knowing why (why them, why that particular moment in time?) have been allowed for one brief moment, to seize a few strands of this immemorial network of forbidden dreams. So that, fifteen years ago, why not me? (Réage 1971, 14-15)

Like Sade, Réage realizes that our relationships with others immediately yet quite rightly constrain us: our freedom cannot be absolute and cannot exist truly without at least to some degree impinging upon the freedom of others. And indeed, the idea of personal freedom and its opposite—slavery to convention—are central to *O*. Paradoxically, though, freedom has its own complications. In his preface to the 1954 edition of *Histoire d'O* , entitled "Du Bonheur Dans L'Esclavage," Jean Paulhan describes a true account of a strange revolt that occurred in Barbados in 1838 during which about 200 newly emancipated, black slaves returned to their former owner (a certain Glenelg) and begged him to take them back into bondage. Their spokesman read out a list of grievances about their newly obtained freedom: clearly sudden liberation had brought its own special kind of problems. Glenelg refused to take them back, and an argument began which devolved into a fight and ended with the slaughter of Glenelg and his family. After the slaughter, the former slaves returned to their old cabins and resumed their lives exactly as they were before their emancipation (Réage 1954, I-II).

This curious event gives rise to many questions relating to the nature of freedom and the surrender of the will, the same kind of questions that *Histoire d'O* deals with in such a different culture so many years later.

However, not all feminist voices have been raised in condemnation of *O*. Critic Amalia Ziv sees in *O* the possibility for a new understanding of female sexual identity. Ziv, who acknowledges many of the inequalities that exist in this "patriarchal" society, nevertheless does not espouse the contempt for *O* shown by Brown and Faery's ultra-feminist allegorical interpretation. For Ziv, *O* might possibly have a liberating effect in that, while it does present a representation of female subjugation, at the same time, it clearly exposes this subjugation for what it is and perhaps points the way toward the reader's identification and confrontation of it. Ziv contends that the female masochism exemplified in O is not a product of construction but rather a reaction to construction. "Masochism is the trace of the gap between the female subject and the construct 'woman' which she assimilates" (Ziv 1994, 67). In Ziv's critical paradigm, masochism assumes a functional role as the female attempts to resolve the tension caused by the fact that she at once identifies with the patriarchy and is frustrated by the way it objectifies her. The masochistic fantasy then allows the female protagonist to relegate these irreconcilable notions to a separate area apart from the ordinary. Although Ziv would not recommend masochism as a useful form of resistance, she does contend that *Histoire d'O* and books like it should not be condemned for being complicit with the patriarchal construction of the female, since, "mixed in with the poison, they already contain a dose of the antidote" (p 68).

The intricate relationship between pain and pleasure is one that is reflected at all levels of this culture. Edith Piaf sings about preferring death over being loveless; an old Frank Sinatra tune calls love "The Tender Trap"; a pop tune by the band Nazareth from the '80s tells us, "love hurts, love scars, love wounds and mars." High culture is no less interested in the phenomenon: from the sensibility of Romanticism, to the Tristan and Isolde story, to Shakespeare, to Baudelaire, to Wagner, Western culture has a fascination with themes of dominance and submission, love and hate, and the curious amalgam of devotion, pain and ideas of the self. Like O herself, to a greater or lesser degree we all exist in a delicate state between a constructed and ordered world, and a chthonic realm of sexuality, emotions and instincts. In the novel, O attempts to bridge this gap. As she describes the process of writing *O*, Réage contemplates a fundamental question: "Could it be that the story was the deformed, the inverted image of my life?" (cited in de St Jorre 1994, 215):

> I saw, between what I thought myself to be and what I was relating and thought I was making up, both a distance so radical and a kinship so profound that I was incapable of recognizing myself in it. I no doubt accepted my life with such patience (or passivity, or weakness) only because I was so certain of being able to find whenever I wanted that other, obscure life that is life's consolation, that other life unacknowledged and unshared. Then, all of a sudden, thanks to the man I loved, I did acknowledge it, and henceforth would share it with any and all, as perfectly prostituted in the anonymity of a book as, in the book, that faceless, ageless nameless (even first-nameless) girl. (Réage 1971, 9)

Thus, for Réage, *Histoire d'O* was a literary attempt to come to terms with the "perverse" side of herself, a side which she contends exists in all of us; her conduit in that quest was sexual fantasy. Despite Brown and Faery's disapprobation, the search for love is one of the central guiding metaphors in literature (if not in life). Réage manipulates both the metaphor and conventional views of life to explore and seek some deeper meaning in human motivations. And certainly, the novel touches upon some stark truths: love and pain are inextricably linked; love involves a certain loss of self; submission/domination are at once complementary and illusory—their need for O make both Réne and Sir Stephen dependent upon her, although perhaps to a lesser degree than she depends on them. Quoted in de St Jorre, Réage reveals a disdain for those who would criticize O's submission:

> I think that in all true passion there is a quest for the absolute that can only be attained though a feeling of abandon, of a total dispossession of self . . . Passion is a serious matter. (p 227)

"Passion" is derived from the Latin word *passio* meaning suffering, and the Passion of Christ refers to his flagellation and crucifixion, the significance of which Réage, who was raised by her Roman Catholic grandmother, could not have missed. The use of the word here echoes the delicate relationship alluded earlier between those who mortify their flesh for love of God, and O who does the same thing, not for God, but for the ideal of romantic love.

The Legacy of O

> Sometimes the symbolism of the mystical agony, death and resurrection is conveyed in a brutal manner, aiming directly at the "change of sensibility": certain operations of the shaman-apprentices disclose the aim of "changing the skin" or of radically modifying the sensibility by innumerable tortures and intoxications.
> — Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*

> Yet dearly I love you . . .
> Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravage me.
> — John Donne, "Holy Sonnet XIV"

It is undeniable that *Histoire d'O* is a powerful and disturbing work that leaves an indelible mark on the reader. It is as though O somehow transforms the psyche of the reader as she herself is transformed. I will never forget a surprising revelation made to me some time ago by an old friend, a primary school French teacher with two small sons, a charming husband and a lakeside house in an equally charming small Ontario town, who told me that *Histoire d'O* is one of her favourite books. I was flabbergasted to imagine that my settled and conservative old friend had actually even heard of *Histoire d'O*, let alone liked it. When pressed, she told me that she was fascinated with the passive grace with which O submits to her seemingly inexorable fate. She was also transfixed by the constant seesawing of her own emotions—how something so overtly alarming could, in the dispassionate and elegant voice of the narrator come to seem logical and inevitable and devoid of shame. She was interested in how O takes charge of her own fate and accepts her own "perversity" unequivocally. It is interesting to note too, that despite its subject matter, *Histoire d'O* is not vulgar, and is devoid of "dirty" language so common in stock pornography. Indeed, one of the adjectives that Jean Paulhan uses to describe *O* is "decent" (cited in Réage 1954, vi).

If pornography is the portrayal of sexual acts divorced from a social context, and made solely for titillation, then *Histoire d'O* is not pornography. Susan Sontag suggests that O is perhaps more usefully considered as "metapornography, a brilliant parody" (Sontag 1969, 148). Through the medium of sex and a gradual loss of her "normal" identity, O seems to find a purity of self; she subsumes her daily, "ordinary" existence within the dark and fantastical one of her imagination and fantasies. The search for the essential identity, then, becomes the main focus in *Histoire d'O*. In *Une Fille Amoureuse*, which Réage wrote several years after *O*, Réage discusses the evanescent quality of identity:

> Nothing is more fallacious and shifting than an identity. If you believe, as hundreds of millions of men do, that we live several lives, why not also believe that in each of our lives we are the meeting place for several souls? "Who am I, finally," said Pauline Réage, "if not the long silent part of someone, the secret nocturnal part which has never betrayed itself in public by any thought, word or deed, but communicates through the subterranean depths of the imaginary with dreams as old as the world itself." (Réage 1971, 12)

For Réage, then, human existence can be seen as both a kind of continuum, and a starting point for explorations of the many sides that constitute a human psyche. Like so many artists before her, Réage explores the sexual, chthonic side of humanity which speaks to the very violence of our conception, the overwhelming power of sexuality to both create and destroy and also of how daily life constrains and tames us. For Réage, conventional and sanctioned love in its predictability and respectability always demands a counterweight, a "most frightful surrender, in which childish images of chains and whips added to the constraint the symbols of constraint" (Réage 1971, 13).

Perhaps the final word about *O* should go to the mysterious author Pauline Réage/Dominique Aury, who, in her interview with John de St Jorre in 1993, provides a phlegmatic reaction to the scandal *O* elicited:

> Much ado about nothing, that's what I think. It was just saying in plain words what has been going on for centuries. Why make so much noise about it? It was just human nature, human conduct, the good and the bad together. (p 231)
>
> And her summation of *Histoire d'O*?
>
> C'était une lettre d'amour. Nothing else. (p 231)

Part 3

Anne Rice's *Exit to Eden*

Anne Rice is perhaps one of the best known and most successful popular American writers of fiction working today. Her vampire chronicles have won her praise, an enormous following, spawned a major Hollywood movie deal and made her extremely wealthy. Unbeknownst to much of middle America, though, Anne Rice has a hidden self, and a pornographic imagination that has spawned five erotic novels, including a very different version of the Sleeping Beauty myth, written as a trilogy, which most parents would likely rather burn than read to their children at night.[15] In fact, Rice might be said to have a triple persona, because she has used two different pseudonyms to publish her erotic works. *The Sleeping Beauty* trilogy (*The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty, Beauty's Punishment, Beauty's Release*) was published under the name A.N. Roquelaure, while two other erotic works (*Exit to Eden* and *Belinda*) were published under the name Anne Rampling.[16] When first released under either of these pseudonyms, none of these books mentioned the real identity of the author on their dustjackets. However, in the true spirit of capitalism, and as a tribute to the financial success of her vampire series, all of these books are now available under "R" for Rice, and the dustjackets only fleetingly mention previous incarnations.

Why the subterfuge?

In the case of *Exit to Eden*, quite naturally, because Rice examines the underbelly of the world of sexuality—sado-masochism—with serious intent. Her depiction of the sado-masochistic experience is a positive one; through sado-masochism her characters find a means to true self-knowledge and expression. North American society is not quite ready to accept that anything positive could be derived from s/m and indeed most references to it in popular culture are mocking or derisory. Thus, Rice's need for extreme circumspection when writing her erotica and also, the reason for the campy and silly Hollywood version of *Exit to Eden* which trivialized the issues and undermined the original and serious intent of the novel.[17] Surely, we would have expected no less from Hollywood or from middle America and Canada, neither of which could ever possibly admit that there might be powerful links between romantic love, freedom of will, physical surrender and physical power. (And despite the fact that the Hollywood version of the movie so undercut the intent of the novel as to erase it, the provincial Censor Board in Saskatchewan embarrassed itself by banning the film in that province. Apparently, spanking, even in fun, is not taken lightly in Canada's heartland.)

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[15] Interestingly, Rice's vampire novels are also highly sexualized, and depict many scenes of violence and death. I am not aware of any move to ban or censor any of these tales; presumably the fact that vampires are popular mythical creatures with a long list of Hollywood credits serves to undermine their often rampant sexuality and thus render it inoffensive to all but the most prudish.

[16] According to Rice, she first saw the French word ***raquelaure***, meaning cloak, in one of Sheridan le Fanu's ghost stories. She thought it would be "sexy" as a pseudonym: Anne under the cloak. The *Rampling* pseudonym is in honour of the actress Charlotte Rampling.

Like *Histoire d'O*, then, *Exit to Eden* is essentially a romantic love story set against a backdrop of whips and chains. These accoutrements, however, are not frivolously inserted; rather, they are an essential feature of the story which, as much as it is about love, is also about self-revelation, testing the limits of selfhood and entering as far as is possible, the mind and spirit of another human being.

Exit to Eden is written as a series of first-person diary-like entries by the two protagonists. The first is Lisa, whose words open the novel. She is the tall, beautiful brunette who is the mastermind behind the "Club," a private island resort somewhere in the Caribbean where rich people pay enormous sums of money to have their every sexual desire catered to by a vast army of "slaves." The slaves are not actual slaves of course; they are all volunteers and have come to the island of their own free will. In the context of the fantasy world of the Club, they do both menial tasks as well as cater to every sexual whim of the wealthy guests. While never truly harmed, the slaves are frequently humiliated and taunted. They are required to be completely naked at all times, to never raise their voice, answer back or disobey and always to do their master's or mistress' bidding.

Lisa begins her diary by stating that the Club is the one thing that gives meaning, direction and a sense of purpose to her life. She reflects that perhaps we are all outsiders in this world, "making our own unusual way through a wilderness of normality that is just myth" (p 6). With these words, she establishes what will be the central considerations of the novel, many of which mirror those of *Histoire d'O*: the conflict between normal and abnormal, the relationship between pleasure and pain, and the tension between the real and the symbolic. Lisa goes on to explain how the dynamics of the Club are set up, how slaves are chosen from the best "auction houses" in the world: apparently there is an entire international subculture of sado-masochistic colleges to teach potential students and teachers the etiquette and practices of the art.

---

[17] When Anne Rice read the manuscript for the film version of *Exit to Eden*, she was appalled and immediately distanced herself from the project.

Next, we meet the second of our two protagonists, and Lisa's eventual lover. His name is Elliot Slater and he is a successful *Time/Life* photographer who has abandoned a highly successful career to hire on at the Club for a two-year stint as a slave. We meet him first in the brig of the ship which is transporting all the slaves to the exclusive island. He is shackled and blindfolded, his arms tied high above his head. He reveals that his reason for coming to the Club relates to something atavistic, something primal, some urge to explore the absolute limits of himself:

> And it is something else, too, that even I can't grasp, some harrowing of the soul, some exploration, some refusal to live on the outside of a dark and heated inner world that exists behind the civilized face I see in the mirror. It goes back, way back. (p 32)

We turn next to Lisa, who recounts the history of her involvement in the trade. In a passage strikingly similar to the description of the ride *O* first takes to Roissy in the car with her lover, Lisa tells of her first experience with sado-masochism, in which she is not a mistress but a slave herself. She reveals how, as a college student, she was initiated into the world of s/m, and graduated to enrollment in a house, like Roissy, where for three months, she became a willing slave not only to a parade of faceless, nameless men, but also to the maids, housekeepers and cooks who worked in the house. She later meets Martin Halifax, the inspiration behind and instructor at an academy in San Francisco which exists solely to train those interested in the art of s/m. Martin Halifax explains to her the reason why he established his "school":

> . . . out there, caught in the web of modern life, there were hundreds of men like me, thousands maybe, roaming the bars, the streets, looking—in spite of danger and disease and God knows what—for the place to enact those little dramas, those rich and frightening little dramas we have known over and over in our souls . . . I don't believe it is wrong, you see. I never believed it was wrong. No. Each of us has within him a dark chamber where the real desires flower; and the horror of it is that they never see the light of another's understanding, those strange blooms. It is as lonely as it is dark, that chamber of the heart. (p 105)

Martin describes his house as place of refuge for those seeking to fulfill their desires and live out their fantasies. He also considers his house as a place of love:

> You understand, this is no ordinary brothel, Lisa. This is a place of elegance and sometimes, beauty. And you might think me mad for saying so, but this is a

> place of love . . . In love, there is understanding, there is respect for the innermost secrets. There is compassion for the very root of desire itself. (p 106)

It was clear from the time that Lisa first meets Elliot that she is attracted to him in more than a physical sense. She senses something in his face, something hidden, waiting to be revealed. For Elliot, Lisa is the embodiment of the perfect woman: sensual, beautiful and terrifying. Their first meeting is fraught with tension, like any first encounter between future lovers, but with some peculiar twists. Elliot is brought to her stark naked and bound; she meets him in her bedroom, and half-naked herself, proceeds to bind his hands to leather thongs far above his head; she then rapes him. Afterwards, she frees him and a more conventional love-making scene takes place, in which Elliot, in a later account, refers to her as a "powerless phantom of the imagination" (p 123). He wakes up hours later, bound again, and Lisa approaches him with a whip in her hand. In a moment of sudden insight, he realizes why he is so full of trepidation at the thought of her being the mistress.

> And there was some instantaneous sense of why this was so horrific, that always before they'd been wearing masks in my imagination, the women or the men that whipped me or subjugated me. It didn't matter who the Hell they were, really, as long as they said the right things, were good. But she wasn't wearing a mask. The fantasy wasn't cloaking her. "I'm scared to death of you," I whispered. I could hear the amazement in my own voice. (p 126-27)

Lisa discovers clues to Elliot's character and why he seems to have such a powerful hold on her. Searching through his bags, she finds his eloquent photos of war ravaged places, like Lebanon and El Salvador and a commentary he wrote to accompany the photos. She asks Scott, Elliot's trainer, about him.

> [Elliot] is too sophisticated to be imagining that he "deserves" all this, or that he was "born to be a slave", or that he's lost in a world "more noble and moral" than the real world, all the lovely romance slaves like to invent for themselves. He knows where he is and what he is doing to himself. (p 160)

Lisa is still puzzled by Elliot's presence at the Club. He is obviously a cut above the regular slaves, many of whom are the "quasi-artistic, highly imaginative sort" for whom sado-masochism is an escape from dreary jobs and lives. Some are delayed adolescents, for whom the Club is a diversion. Then finally, there are others who lose themselves in sado-masochism because they are looking to become themselves. Yet Elliot does not fit into any of these categories. Lisa surmises that perhaps Elliot's trip to the Club is analogous to Burton's trip to Mecca, recounted in *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, a copy of which she finds in his suitcase. Burton recounts how he disguised himself as an Arab to get into the Holy City of Meccah, and he also talks at length about his interest in the sexual practices of people so different from his own, stuffy British upper-class peers. Lisa hypothesizes that Elliot's trip to the Club and his willingness to test both his physical and his emotional limits, have much in common with Burton's pilgrimage, his obsessions and his quests.

> Yes. This had to be a sexual odyssey for Elliot, a deliberate violence to himself, a plunge into the things he feared in a place where he couldn't be hurt.
> And the eerie thought came to me that he was really disguised as a slave the way that Burton has been disguised as an Arab when he penetrated the forbidden city. The disguise was nakedness. And I had found his identity in the things he owned, his clothes. (p 161)

At this stage, Lisa begins to question her own commitment to the Club. She wonders how Elliot, who has taken photos of the horror of the war in Lebanon, who has seen so much misery and suffering, truly saw the Club and all its manifestations:

> Why weren't we obscene to him compared to the suffering of Beirut? Why wasn't our sexual paradise the worst sort of decadent contrivance? How could he take it seriously on any level when he took pictures so skillfully of that? (p 162)

Lisa's obsession with Elliot continues to grow to the point where, again breaking Club regulations, she takes him on an "illegal" romp to New Orleans with her. Thus begins a somewhat more conventional romance. Lisa reveals that she comes from a strict Irish, Roman Catholic background. Her mother is a housewife and her father an instructor at a Jesuit college. Neither knows about the Club; they think that she works at health resort somewhere in the Caribbean.

> "We were what they used to call Catholics in nineteenth-century France," she said, 'immigrants of the interior.'" If you think of devout Catholics as simple, stupid people, you know, peasants in the back of the big city cathedrals saying their rosaries before statues, then you don't know my dad. There is this awesome intellectual weight to everything he says, this constitutional Puritanism, this languishing for death . . . he is a spiritual man, truly a spiritual man. I have not met many people who really live by what they believe as he does. And the funny

> thing is I live by what I believe, absolutely what I believe. The Club is the pure expression of what I believe, I have a philosophy of sex. Sometimes I wish I could tell him about that. (p 194)

In a passage that echoes the words of Pauline Réage, Lisa reveals how, for her, the moral world could not and cannot impinge upon the physical.

> "I will tell you," she said, "what it is that has made me feel like a freak most of my life, and it wasn't having the orgasm at eight years old or listening furtively and shamefully to other little kids describe spankings or slipping off to San Francisco to be whipped in a candelighted room. It's that nobody has ever been able to convince me that anything sexual between consenting individuals is wrong. I mean it's like part of my brain is missing. Nothing disgusts me. It all seems innocent, to do with profound sensations, and when people tell me they are offended by things, I just don't know what they mean." (p 197)

Elliot's upbringing was quite different. His father was an atheist who believed in sexual freedom and took the teenaged Elliot to Las Vegas to "get laid." His father, he remarks, "has the largest collection of pornography outside of the Vatican. But he thought s/m was sick" (p 195).

Lisa and Elliot spend their first evening in New Orleans drinking and carousing, only to get back to the hotel room to discover that the Club has sent people after them because Lisa has, in effect, broke Elliot's contract, something no one has ever done before. Their discovery generates some philosophical talk. Elliot, after recounting his experiences in El Salvador and Beirut reveals that he started to see himself as a potential actor in the senseless violence of war just about anywhere on the planet. He remarks on an all too true human trait—our fascination with death and destruction—fascination that causes huge traffic jams around accidents on highways, and makes scenes of plane crashes the destination of family outings on Sundays. Elliot begins to question what it was within him that was seeking this proximity to violence, and whether or not he could be easily manipulated into acting out these atavistic, violent tendencies on a more than symbolic level. For him, seeking out violence at a place like the Club is a way of symbolically acting out what he fears he may capable of physically acting out :

> There is nothing obscene about two people in a bedroom trying to find in sadomasochistic sex the symbolic solution to their sexual aggressions. The obscenity is those who literally rape, literally kill, literally strafe whole villages, blow up busloads of innocent people, literally and relentlessly destroy . . . You know the difference between the symbolic and the literal . . . You know what we

> do at the Club is play. And you know the origins of that play are deep, deep inside us in a tangle of chemical and cerebral components that defy competent analysis. . . . Well, so are the origins of the human impulse to make war as far as I'm concerned. . . . what you have is the same mystery, the same urgency, the same complexity that underlies sexual aggression. And it has as much to do with the sexual desire to dominate, and/or submit as the rituals we play at the Club. For all I know, it is *all* sexual aggression. (p 221)

Elliot goes on to delve even further into the psychology of the sado-masochistic experience:

> These things [i.e. the paraphernalia associated with s/m] don't come from childhood; they come from our historic past, they come from our racial past. The whole bloody lineage that embraces violence since time immemorial. They are the seductive and terrifying symbols of cruelties that were routine right up through the eighteenth century. . . . No, in S&M, we're always working with something a hell of a lot more volatile than childhood struggles; we're both working with our most primitive desires to achieve intimacy through violation, our deepest attractions to suffering and inflicting pain, to *possessing* others. . . (p 233)

For Elliot, the Club has a therapeutic function; it helps him to strip off the layers of his personality to discover a kernel of his real self. It is an awesome and terrifying experience for him.

Two of the principal male trainers from the Club, Scott and Richard, arrive; Lisa tells Elliot to go back to the Club and promises that she will meet him there in a couple of days. Elliot declares his love for her, but she reacts badly and insists that he leave. She then calls Martin Halifax, who arrives the following day and functions as Lisa's father confessor—she is experiencing an existential crisis in which she questions the very nature of the Club and her fascination with sado-masochism. She tries to elicit Martin's help:

> Is what we do right, Martin? Or is it evil? Are we the good thing that we tell ourselves we are, are we the healthy thing we say we are to others? Or are we some evil, twisted thing that never should come to be? Are we bad? (p 279)

Martin reminds her that his own establishment and the Club and by extension all like establishments are responsible for decriminalizing and demystifying "exotic" sex. He tells her that the reason he felt so positively about her upon their first meeting was that her motivation was simple: love.

> You told me that in a very real way you loved all the sexual adventurers who didn't hurt others. . . . You felt love and pity for the old flasher in the park who opens his coat, the guy on the bus who rubs against the pretty girl, never daring to speak to her. You felt love for the drag queens and the transvestites and the transsexuals. You said that you were they and they were you. (p 279)

Lisa tells Martin that love-making with Elliot was the first time she has ever experienced sex naturally, without the artifice of the s/m machine that she so painstakingly and with such conviction designed herself. She tells Martin that with Elliot, something intangible has occurred and she is at a loss as to what it is. Martin, almost bemusedly, informs her that, quite simply, she has fallen in love. She has been so removed from the sensations of "ordinary" emotions that she has been unable to identify the reason for her own behaviour. Lisa is almost convulsed at Martin's diagnosis:

> Martin . . . I can't love a man like that. I can't. It's like I'm dissolving. I'm coming apart, like I am a mechanism, dependent upon a thousand little wheels and springs which is suddenly breaking down, each part beginning to run at its own speed, uncontrollably, I can't love like a normal person at all. (p 287)

Martin urges her to tell Elliot that she has loves him, to admit something aloud which her inner being has known for some time. Lisa is horrified at the prospect of confronting Elliot with the truth. She cannot accept that her love was born in the Club; she does not feel that what she is/was at the Club can be reconciled with the person she became during their tumultuous week together. Lisa realizes that the rituals at the Club were a shield to protect her from true intimacy and is shocked to admit that "it was a moral deal all along" (p 289). Martin analyses further:

> You know, Lisa, very few of us anymore get through life without a dramatic bid for freedom. That dramatic bid is the hallmark of our times. But most of us never really reach our goal. We get stuck halfway between the morass of myth and morality we left behind and the utopia on which we've set our sights. That's where you are, stuck between that dismal, repressive Catholic morality you came from and that vision of a world in which no form of love is a sin. You've scored your victories, and they've been spectacular, but if you think you cannot love Elliot, you've paid an awfully high price at the same time. (p 289)

Martin urges Lisa to return to the Club and make her confession to Elliot and let things take their natural course. However, upon her return, she finds that Elliot has abandoned the Club and departed for San Francisco, where he will spend a couple of days before heading out on another photo assignment. She immediately follows him, finds his house, and confesses her love for him. He asks her to marry him, and while she initially resists the idea of such a conventional arrangement, she finally agrees, and they decide to go to Venice for the ceremony. The novel concludes in a manner that would do justice to any Harlequin romance:

> I clung to him as the limo made its awkward lumbering turn on the narrow hillside, tumbling us even closer together.
> "Tell me again that you love me," he said.
> "I love you," I said. (p 308)

Part 4

O and *Eden*

Since sex is older than literature, one would think it is entitled to more respect.
— William Phillips, former editor of *Partisan Review*

Although written over 30 years apart, *Histoire d'O* and *Exit to Eden* share many characteristics, although the latter betrays a much more modern and feminist sensibility. First, they are both written by women using pseudonyms. Pauline Réage wanted to remain anonymous to avoid embarrassing her family and almost surely to avoid the attention of the curious, eager to see what a woman who could write such a novel looked like; Rice sought anonymity to avoid damaging her mainstream career. Neither novel is even slightly apologetic about its subject; instead, both use sado-masochism as an artistic device to reveal their characters' explorations of the limits of selfhood.

In *O*, the female protagonist is introduced to the practice of sado-masochism and is seduced utterly by it; in Rice's work, the female protagonist had already been seduced for years before the time we meet her, although we are told how she came to be involved in s/m; however, the introduction of the male protagonist to s/m is an integral part of the novel. Importantly, in each novel, s/m is a total existence; it is not a weekend diversion or a circumscribed situation within ordinary existence (Ziv 1994, 62). The two novels also share a large degree of verisimilitude with respect to their treatment of time and place. *O* takes place in Paris, and mentions real streets and structures, and other things that help the reader to situate it. *Eden* is contemporary, and while it takes place largely on an unnamed island in the Caribbean, it too, with its references to San Francisco and New Orleans, clearly situates itself in an identifiable place and time. In Sadean tradition, the scenes of sado-masochism take place in more or less isolated places (at Roissy, O's apartment, Samois) in *Histoire d'O*, and in *Eden*, in various specialized houses and on an island. The everyday world seems to fade away from the events that occur in these places, which, as Ziv (1994) observes, is in concert with Sontag's observation that "The universe proposed by the pornographic imagination is a total universe. It has the power to ingest and metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything to the one negotiable currency of the erotic imperative" (Sontag 1969, 163). For Sontag, pornography's dominant principle is the multiplicity of sexual exchanges (p 163); s/m adds the emphasis on duty, scripted play and regimentation. The rules that O must follow are strict; once broken, punishment is swift. In *Eden*, Elliot is made to do kitchen clean-up when he breaks the rules by "hamming it up" at the slave auction. It is important to note, though, that the masochistic fantasy requires the purposeful and premeditated transgression of the rules from time to time; the greater the punishment, the more the pleasure derived from the punishment.

A major difference between *Histoire d'O* and *Exit to Eden* lies in their respective sensibilities; they are each clearly works of their times. The absence of a feminist sensibility in *O* and the clear alignment along gender lines of the master/slave relationship (Ziv 1994, 164) have troubled and outraged many. Thus, feminist critics have castigated Réage for her deception: *O* isn't about freedom at all, but about the perpetuation of the domination by males of females. Rice's work would appear to be much more politically in step with the times. In *Exit to Eden*, the "dominant" character is a female and the submissive, masochistic one a male, thus subverting the paradigm of traditional male physical domination. Further, Rice is concerned with a different kind of pleasure in *Exit to Eden*; references to both protagonists' sexual pleasure abound and indeed, the search for pleasure is a major preoccupation in *Eden*, whereas in *Histoire d'O*, there are relatively few references to O's own pleasure or arousal—her degradation and humiliation seem much more important and interesting to her, as they are to her masters (Ziv 1994, 65). Sontag (1969) identifies two modes characteristic of literary pornography: comedy and tragedy. In tragedy, as exemplified in *Histoire d'O*, the erotic subject-victim heads inexorably toward death, while in comedy, the obsessional pursuit of sexual exercise is rewarded with terminal gratification, usually in the form of marriage (pp 150-51).

Finally, *Histoire d'O* is generally considered to be a literary work—Sontag, rates it alongside Bataille and Louÿs and above works like *Fanny Hill*, Wilde's *Teleny*, and Appollinaire's *The Debauched Hospodar* (Sontag 1969, 132). Rice's work, with its singularity of vision and intent, belongs squarely in the realm of popular fiction. Although Rice's treatment of "perversion" is thoughtful and considered, in the end, the voice of the novel is simply too polemical and the texture too uniform, and *Exit to Eden* remains a less complex and certainly less troubling work than *Histoire d'O*, which is one of those works greater than the sum of its parts. *O* deals with some of the darkest truths that humans may face about their own nature, if they have the courage; it pokes a stick at the guard dog of Western anti-sex sentiment, but is neither prurient nor disrespectful.

Part 5

The Imaginative World of S/M—The Agony and the Ecstasy

> Masochism is an attempt not to fascinate the other by my objectivity,
> but to be myself fascinated by my objectivity in the eyes of the other.
> — Sartre

In the end, whatever the researchers, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, sociologists, or feminists may conclude about the practice of s/m, several points appear clear. S/m often portrays a consensual activity, in which each party if aware of the physical consequences and agrees to them. Second, s/m reveals a world of fantasy, imagination and play.[18]

It is a salient fact of both *Histoire d'O* and *Exit to Eden*, that the sexual activities depicted therein, whatever their nature, are clearly consensual. Throughout *Histoire d'O*, both René and Sir Stephen frequently ask O if she agrees to give herself completely and utterly to them. At all points, O agrees and she becomes the author, as it were, of her own torture. As we have seen, though, she finds liberation in her servitude and takes pride in the symbols of her slavery. Similarly, in *Exit to Eden*, Elliot finds immense sexual satisfaction in his role as a slave, even as he sometimes feels degraded and humiliated. Like Lisa, both René and Sir Stephen play the dominant roles, yet, in their need, they are somehow subservient to their respective slaves. The sadist achieves power in his or her physical mastery over the other; the masochist achieves power in submission, a kind of victory in defeat. René, Sir Stephen and Lisa need someone against whom they can turn their deep need to control; O and Elliot need someone to understand and explore their deepest desires to be controlled.

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[18] Although sadism is named for the Marquis de Sade, the understanding of sado-masochism proposed in this thesis recognizes that the "sadism" as it exists in Sade's works is different and does not display the characteristics (for example, consensuality) discussed here.

In an interview with critic and scholar Katherine Ramsland, Anne Rice echoes O's thoughts on freedom within captivity, noting that a knowledge of their limitations allows people a kind of freedom (1996, 44). However, like even the most informed and sympathetic researcher, Rice is at a loss to explain the true provenance of sadomasochistic pleasure.

> What I am trying to say is that sadomasochism has nothing to do with the way one is brought up. . . . If we look for a cause, we would have to look into something like racial memory, something encoded in the genes, some way in which, after thousands of years we've turned experiences of violence and violation into something erotic as we've tamed it. We have a vast history of war and pillage and rape, and obviously the fantasies of sadomasochism play with all those images. Rape is an archetypal fantasy. It's part of our racial memory. To fantasize about it doesn't mean we literally want to be raped by some stranger, or that we will act it out. It seems to me far more likely that the explanation is in some sort of racial memory or genetic response. No environmental approach to it makes sense to me. (cited in Ramsland 1996, pp 52-53)

Although she is puzzled by the true root of s/m pleasure, Rice does contend that cultures that emphasize sin and repress sexuality inevitably generate people who equate punishment and pleasure (Ramsland 1996, 43), and certainly, the erotic nature of the taboo would seem to support that notion (see Chapter III for a discussion of taboos). For Rice the practice of pornography and the exploration of s/m allow her to explore her fascination with the "dark" side of the human psyche, dark being the negative label put on sexual desires and impulses by our puritanical culture. It was the rebellious nature of unorthodox sexualities that appealed to her most.

> I was always enchanted with the transgressive. It always seemed to raise my temperature a bit mentally when I glimpsed something others called perverse, especially if I saw deep feeling involved. I always felt that a door was ajar on a

> world that was more vital than our own, that in perversity lies a great secret: true love. (cited in Ramsland 1996, 35)

Mixed in with Rice's attraction to the transgressive act, is her fascination with the mediaeval Catholic church and the sensuality both of the Church and its saints. She learned about mediaeval flagellants and about how they and the saints pushed themselves mentally and physically to extreme, but delectable, heights of pain, to increase their spiritual ecstasy and to demonstrate their love for God. The aforementioned St. Teresa of Avila was her preferred saint and indeed became one of her heroines:

> The mystics would surrender in ecstasy to Christ, be pierced by his arrow, and fall into a sublime trance state akin to sexual fulfillment. It's all dominance and submission, and it's quite beautiful. I read a lot about mysticism when I was a Catholic girl, about meditation on Christ's passion, his wounds, the Stations of the Cross, all of it. (cited in Ramsland 1996, 5)

Pauline Réage also sees a close, and for her unproblematic, relationship between religious faith and sexual ecstasy. In her conversation with Régine Deforges she notes that as a young girl, she was profoundly influenced by the writings of Fénelon, especially his exploration of the soul in love with God. For Réage, the yielding of the soul to God, the complete submission of the self to another, the "disappropriation" is quite simply "love" (cited in Deforges 1979, 145). The idea of being delivered from the fetters of identity is, for Réage, akin to the giving of oneself to God.

> After all, whether at Roissy or elsewhere, O, that girl who has given herself over to her lover, is under his constant surveillance, as one is under God's, with the same faith, the same meek and trembling gentleness, that same constantly revocable certainty. (ibid 145)

For anyone raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition, particularly as a Roman Catholic, the notions of sin and absolution from sin via penance are of monumental importance. From the wearing of hair shirts to the mea culpas of the Latin mass, the idea that Christians are born sinners who must undergo punishment in order to reap Heaven's rewards is a powerful one. The Roman Catholic Church in particular is fond of icons and bloody and tortured images of Jesus. Feminist writer and critic Avital Ronnell remarks on the curiously sado-masochistic figure of Christ himself:

> What could be more pornographic than a crucifix? Here you have this virgin body that is totally S&M'd, wounded, bloody, crushed against a restraint and naked in pure offering—in a sacrificial ceremonial. What's odd is the widespread recognition of the completely S&M culture that Christianity has always embodied (even if the Protestant version is more austere and tries to get away from the voluptuousness of the suffering, self flagellant and detailing of the sacrificial idiom, the purity of pain that Catholicism insists upon). Nonetheless, at some point one has to confront its S&M origins or at least try to understand the relationship to Christianity. (Ronnell 1991, 136)

Morse Peckham in his 1969 study of the interdependence of art, pornography and sexual behaviour addresses the transcendent quality of s/m in the religious context. He remarks on the enormous appeal of surrender, which he calls the "appeal of Paradise" (1969, 215) and he surmises that this is the appeal that Jesus Christ held for the poor in spirit and the poor in will. For Peckham, sexuality and the practice of sado-masochism perfectly accommodate internal conflicts related to the exercise or denial of will. Because it is essentially a private activity, sexuality has the luxury of "psychic insulation" and distance from other social relations, both of which qualities allow for the individual to experience a playing out and an eventual resolution of internal conflicts, in the form of either the "uninhibited exercise of the will to challenge without cognitive tension or the symmetrical exercise of the will to submit" (1969, 216).

It would seem, then, that for many, pornography in general and the sado-masochistic experience in particular are able to awaken imaginative possibilities with potentially curative effects. For Pauline Réage, *O* was "purement du fantasme" (Réage 1975, 161); the character of O is a cipher through which she could explore notions of redemption and absolution and limits of experience. Just as Réage abjures the standards and strictures of conventional morality, so must the thoughtful reader of *O*, for it is certainly no more illuminating to consider *Histoire d'O* as pornography in the conventional, pejorative sense of the word, than it is to consider *The Odyssey* as a mere adventure tale. The truth of each lies beyond the surface meaning.

For Anne Rice, pornography and sado-masochism function as safe havens where the imagination is free to create alternative lives and selves. However, inherent in the very definition of the imaginary is the notion of actuality. The imaginary is a place for potentials, even unpleasant or socially unacceptable ones, but it is also a place from which one returns, a return that always involves a transformation, even a very slight one, of the self—"when you return, you always know more" (cited in Ramsland 1996, 36). The character of Elliot Slater, who is on the run from the terrifying violence of the real world, provides a mouthpiece for Rice's own views. Rice, through the words of Elliot, states that our most violent and basic urges cannot be legislated out of us; that war is deaf to political edicts and all the legislation in the world cannot hope to ever stop violence. For the sake of its own survival, society needs safety hatches: pornography can be one these. The sado-masochistic fantasy is a fulfilling but essentially harmless way to purge our psyches of our innate desire for violence.

Feminist theorist and writer bell hooks promotes and valorizes the practice of role playing so central to the s/m experience:

> Certain feminist writings by lesbian women on SM discuss what role playing is in terms of *confronting a dragon*, and realize that in the *confrontation* of that dragon (through the role playing), it no longer has power over you. I think it's been really hard for some feminists to "hear" that the ritualized role playing in eroticism and sexuality can be *empowering* . . . because there's such a moralistic tendency to only see it as a disempowering reenactment of the patriarchy's sexual politics. Whereas . . . there's the possibility . . . of working symbolically through it in a way that touches back on your *real* life, so that ultimately you *are* more empowered. (emphasis hers, 1991, 81)

For hooks, play acting involved in the s/m scenario allows for the expiation of something that is truly terrifying—the symbolic working through of one's profoundest fears—so that in the end, the actor himself is empowered.

Part 6

S/M Writ Large

That cruelty and the sexual instinct are most intimately connected is
beyond doubt taught by the history of civilization.
— Freud

Human cultures are paradoxical. On the one hand, the majority of the world's religions hold brotherly love and self-sacrifice as their highest ideals; on the other, it has almost become a cliché to point out all the evil that has been done in the name of religious ideals. The true provenance of sado-masochistic pleasure can probably never be known, and will likely persist as a question for researchers and philosophers and a field ripe for theory. However, if we remain undaunted by the seeming impenetrabilities of cultures, we can perhaps draw many conclusions from our observations and at least account, in part, for much of the behaviour that we see around us. One way of doing so is through the medium of myth.

In *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell relates a story about a tribal society in New Guinea that reflects the relationship between sex, birth and death (1988, 106). In the ritual performed by this society, a large shed made of enormous logs supported by two uprights is erected. A chosen young woman, dressed as a deity, enters the shed and lies down. With a background of chanting and drumming, all the boys who have come of age enter the shed in turn and have intercourse with the girl. When the last boy has entered and is in her embrace, the others remove the supports; the logs crash down and kill the couple; their dead bodies are then pulled out, roasted and eaten. According to Campbell, this ritual is significant on a number of levels: it symbolizes the inseparability of begetting and death; it marks the original union of the male and female before the separation of the genders took place; and it is the repetition of the original act of the killing of a god who then provides food for the sustenance of the tribe (p 106). While it sounds barbarous to the Western reader, the underlying ethic bears some striking similarities to the rituals of the Christian mass.

> And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

> And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.
> And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. (Mark 14: 22-24)

In both the ritual Campbell describes and in the familiar Christian ceremony, the real or symbolic body and blood of the sacrificed one attain a pivotal significance. They are ingested in the new body; take hold and work within. And both the sacrificed and the audience apparently play their parts willingly—the New Guinean couple and the Lamb of God met their fates with full foreknowledge, and are thus complicit in their own bodily destruction but evidently are sure enough of the importance of this ritual to the spiritual health of the tribe to make the sacrifice. For Jesus, of course, the stakes are very high: no less than the redemption of all mankind. Campbell relates a story from the apocryphal Christian Acts of John which describes Jesus indulging in a merry, pre-crucifixion dance, holding the disciples' hands and singing.

> . . . at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus says to the company, "Let us dance!" And they all hold hand in a circle, and as they circle around him, Jesus sings, "Glory be to thee, Father!"
> To which the circling company responds, "Amen."
> "Glory be to thee, Word!"
> And again, "Amen."
> "I would be born and I would bear!"
> "Amen."
> "I would eat and I would be eaten!"
> "Amen."
> . . .
> When you go to your death that way, as a god, in the knowledge of the myth, you are going to your eternal life. So what is there in that to be sad about? Let us make it magnificent—as it is. Let us celebrate it. (p 109)

The intent here is not a religious exegesis of the New Testament, but rather to illustrate the pan-cultural phenomena of sex, birth and death rituals, their intimate inter-relationship and the attendant violence. Indeed, these are basic themes: everything that is born dies; life requires death; both life and death are fraught with violence. And the sexual experience is the closest that humans can come to experiencing the powerful, ineffable forces of life and death. Campbell observes: "The god of death is at the same time the lord of sex" (p 109). It is perhaps this duality of sex/death, this conflation of creative and destructive powers, that informs the sado-masochistic experience. As the characters in Réage's and Rice's novels are pushed to greater and greater levels of physical endurance, as the pain of their beatings increases, more and more of their cultural artifices are stripped away. In this lies the freedom they speak of. Their personalities are increasingly laid bare and their bodies attain a ritualistic status that transcends mere physical pleasure. O particularly, in that one troublesome ambiguous ending, becomes a sacrifice to the great powers that move the universe.

It would seem apparent that we live in a culture which associates guilt with pleasure, sexual and otherwise. To counter this pernicious and pervasive sense of guilt, Green and Green call for the restoration of fantasy to a privileged role. According to the Greens, the isolation of sex as a statistic and its status as an area of empirical study have skewed our view of it—there are some things that cannot be pinned down or delineated by science. The effect of scientific research on the sexual imagination, they claim, has created a bipolar world in which two opposite poles have been erected: normal and deviant, the latter meaning, of course, an aberration, a rebellion, a "mutilation" (p 103). This has seen the denigration of the world of fantasy and the privilege of the imagination, and the very basis of creative consciousness. Many have claimed that because s/m does not tell a literal truth, this compromises its artistic integrity. Sontag exposes the spuriousness of this argument by pointing out that the genre to which a work belongs is not reason enough to dismiss it from being considered a worthy piece of literature. Surely no serious critic should condemn a work because it was "mere fantasy" or would chastise another for not examining the whole of human experience, and this may be especially true in this fragmented, post-post modern age (Sontag 1969, 142). S/m goes beyond the simple relationship of sex and biology to incorporate the realm of the imagination.

Not surprisingly, academic writings on masochism take divergent approaches, and indeed the literary establishment seems equally as divided as the psychiatric establishment over the definition and meaning of sado-masochism. Critic Carol Siegel in *Male Masochism: Modern Revisions of the Story of Love*, tells us that for many critics, masochism is related to language and art (1995, 3). For others masochism is related to the acceptance of the "shattering of the human subject" and is related to both orgasm and the pleasure provide by art (p 4). Siegel recounts the works of one critic, Linda Williams, who began a 1988 essay by asking if the pleasure derived from reading could be due to anything other than "erotogenic masochism—the offering of one's self as a slave to the text" (cited in Siegel 1995, 3). In contrast, yet another critic, Jessica Benjamin, examines the function of masochism as a strategy for establishing a safely structured connection to the "Other," thus allowing the masochist to cast off the bonds of falsehood and allow a hidden, inner self to emerge (cited in Siegel 1995, 5). For Siegel herself, masochism is an invention of the 19th century, created textually in response to the impact of specific developments in gender and sexual politics on the conventions of narrative poetry and prose. Thus, Siegel removes masochism from the stigma of syndrome or perversion and places it squarely in the semantic camp (1995, 2).

According to Green and Green, we can see sado-masochistic behaviour allegorically on the part of nations. In *Studies in Sado-Masochism*, they examine the nature of the American national character, which they describe as a masochistic culture in slavery to technology. They assert that the U.S. has failed to code its unconscious; the result of this failure is ennui (1973, 47), referred to by sociologist Emile Durkheim as "anomie" and by media philosopher Marshall McLuhan as "narcissus-narcosis." That is, American culture is mesmerized by itself. This results in a paralyzing of critical facilities and the razing of any ethical framework. Americans have made themselves spectators of sex and, as a result, spectators of bloodshed. TV news has become entertainment and grisly pictures of bombs dropping on ancient cities like Baghdad are juxtaposed with shampoo commercials and baseball scores.

> . . . we [the U.S.] are, as a culture, terrified of sadism because we are committing it with such relish. We retreat from the mirror in alarm. In the widest sense, of course, a technology fulfills its sadistic drives in dominating its environment, the end-product of which seems to be dropping gelled gasoline fluid on Asian peasants, and calling the activity "pacification" by napalm, incendigel, or whatever the scientific neologism of the moment may be. (Green and Green 1973, 48)

The United States is certainly not the only nation to suffer from a mass psychosis. They also mention Nazi Germany, and the transmogrification of the French Revolution, which began with reason and principles as its guiding lights, descended into a blood bath and finished up with a military dictatorship (Green and Green 1973, 47). And even the most fleeting perusal of a newspaper informs us that extreme acts of violence are occurring every day in scattered corners of the earth. The Greens would contend that insofar as these acts of violence are based on dominance/submission, they are sado-masochistic.

Chapter Three

Bestiality: The Last Taboo?—Marian Engel's *Bear*

But if we were to limit ourselves to what the nice people of the world
at any given time find immediately acceptable, we would have no literature.
The alarm bells of the present ring in the insights of the future.
—Adele Wiseman

From these contrarities spring what the religious call Good and Evil.
Good is the passive that obeys reason.
Evil is the active, springing from energy.
— William Blake, "Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

A Pawnee Indian said: "In the beginning of all things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animal. For Tirawa, the One Above, did not speak directly to man. He sent certain animals to tell mankind that he showed himself through the beast. And that from them and from the stars and the sun and the moon, man should learn."
—Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

Introduction

Bestiality, known more clinically as zoolagnia or zoophilia, is the overt theme of Canadian writer Marian Engel's 1976 Governor General award winning novel *Bear*, the publication of which caused quite a stir in the world of Canadian letters. However, anyone who bought a copy of *Bear* hoping for an outrageous or titillating sexual fantasy deserving of the quickest disapprobation from the Censor Board would have been quite disappointed on two counts: although he clearly has his symbolic meaning, the hirsute lover of the female protagonist of *Bear* is not a fantasy; and *Bear* is a thoughtful, respectable literary work, in which author Marian Engel elevates the act of bestiality between a lonely Torontonian and a Northern Ontario black bear from the actual to the metaphysical plane.[19] The bear comes to symbolize a limit of knowledge and experience for the protagonist as she uses him in her search for self and her exploration of the relationship between myth and reality, the actual and the ideal and the sometimes unbridgeable chasm between the intellect and instincts. Through the medium of myth (and the bear plays a large part in mythologies from a host of different cultures) and in her rapprochement with the natural world, the protagonist comes to a new knowledge of herself and the meaning and limits of her humanity. In the end, the bestiality portrayed in the novel, while initially shocking, somehow ceases to be so.

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[19] Critic Donald Hair recalls the lurid jacket cover of the paperback edition, accurate in only the most superficial sense: "The shocking, erotic novel of a woman in love" (p 34).

If the aim of pornography is to arouse sexual excitement, *Bear*, which met with generally favourable critical success, must nevertheless be considered a resolute failure. The sexual elements in the book may shock or even disgust some readers, but it would be difficult indeed to imagine arousal as the outcome of even the most libertine reading of this novel. Rather than classifying the work as either pornographic or erotic (and indeed even to claim that *Bear* is an erotic novel would be stretching a point) perhaps it would be more fruitful to consider the use that Engel makes of "pornographic" elements and the links between sexuality and humanity's hidden, chthonic nature.

Part 1

The Body of the Beast

Medieval Christians believed that a bear was born as a shapeless white lump of flesh, a little larger than a mouse, without eyes or hair, and that the mother bear would lick this mass into shape, eventually forming a bear cub. The legend was seen as a symbol of the Christian church converting the unbeliever to the "true faith."
— *The Encyclopedia of World Myth and Legend*

Scratch a lover, find a foe.
— Dorothy Parker

Bear, then, is a story of unearthing of layers of self, identity, mythical realities and literal ones. Lou, the heroine, is a researcher and archivist for a historical institute in Toronto. She is sent to an island in Northern Ontario upon the death of a certain Colonel Cary, who has bequeathed the entire island, including a large, octagonal house and its contents to the museum. It is Lou's job to catalogue the contents of the house and to cull anything relevant to early settlement in the area. She packs her bags and leaves the city already experiencing a sense of rebirth and well-being associated with the thrusting off of the unnatural constraints of urban life and a return to the natural world, an inverse of the Biblical fall from grace, a move from experience to innocence. And indeed, the theme of the rural/urban fissure is a common and often-treated one in

Canadian literature. However, there is more than an escape from urban pollution that awaits Lou in her trek northward.

After a long drive, Lou arrives at a marina, and is greeted by the owner, Homer, who knows about her imminent arrival and who ferries her over to the island. Once there, he shows her around and then tells her about the bear: it seems that Colonel Cary, the original inhabitant of the island, kept a pet bear in imitation of one of his Romantic heroes, Lord Byron. Since then, there had always been a bear on Cary Island. Since the death of the last Cary, the bear had been looked after by an old native woman, Lucy LeRoy. Lou is rather taken aback, however, when her first encounter with the bear shows him to be less than prepossessing. He is variously described as daft looking, tired and sad, and lumpish with piggish, ugly eyes. Yet despite this unpromising first appearance, from the strong whiff of shit and musk which he exudes, she is acutely and immediately aware of his maleness.

Lou's initial interest in the bear is eclipsed by her fascination with the house and its contents. She loves to read and is delighted to find that old Colonel Cary had a brilliant library, containing everything from Voltaire to geography books, but concentrating primarily on the Romantics, Byron in particular. As she leafs though one book, from between the pages falls a note written by the original Colonel Cary, describing the genus of the bear and enumerating its physical characteristics. It is the first of a series of twelve notes about bears that Lou will discover in her explorations. The notes are a curiosity, revealing both a magical aspect of the bear (relating stories from various mythologies and legends) and literal, providing encyclopedia-like details about bears.

As she starts to establish a regular routine, she becomes more and more interested in the bear and increasingly fascinated with his exoticness. Then one day, shortly after her arrival, Lucy LeRoy comes to pay a visit to the bear to ensure that he is being looked after. Lucy, an ancient native woman acting as the repository of ancient knowledge (Wiseman 1976, 7), bridges the gap between the bear's natural world and Lou's repressed, human world. She gives Lou advice on how to establish a closer rapport with the bear, how to make him trust her:

> Shit with the bear," she said. "He like you, then. Morning you shit, he shit. Bear lives by smell. He like you. (p 49)

The next morning, Lou follows Lucy's advice and immediately her relationship with the bear seems to change, the barriers seem lower and she begins to lose her fear of him. Contrary to Homer's advice, she removes his chain and takes him swimming, and afterwards finds an old brush and curries him. Later that evening, during her research, another note fluttering out of a book informs her that the Laplanders venerate the bear and the Norwegians never say its name for fear that it might ravage their crops. Instead, they call it "the old man with the fur cloak" (p 53).

The summer wears on. Lou gets more deeply into her work, and also starts to establish a routine with the bear. She takes him swimming on a regular basis and begins to eat her meals near him, increasing their intimacy. Then one night as she is upstairs in the study, she hears the bear enter the kitchen and cross the room on his way upstairs, where he flops on the floor in front of the fireplace. After her initial alarm, Lou continues to read, eventually taking off her shoes and running her bare feet in the thick fur of his back.

The next day, after a joint swim, the bear approaches and licks the water off her back. This incident, which turns out to be so pleasing, prompts her to remember an incident from her past which emphasizes her bad relationships with men:

> . . . she had picked up a man in the street . . . She still shied away from the memory of how he turned out not to be a good man. Surely the bear . . . no: it was fright that linked them, fright and flight. (p 64)

Her research that night reveals more bear lore: we learn how, to the Eskimos, the soul of a wounded polar bear stays three days near the spot where it leaves the body. The slaughtering and consumption of polar bear flesh elicits many complicated rituals and ceremonies among these people. To the Laplanders, the bear is king of the beasts and any hunter who kills a bear must live three days alone to cleanse himself. One night, as Lou sits with the bear and looks out over the lake, she tells him that she loves him.

She continues to find notes as they escape from books: she learns about the Ursuline order of nuns, founded in Paris in 1604 to succour the poor and educate the young. Ursula and her children populate the sky (p 70). In Ireland, there is a god who was a bear. In Switzerland, bears kept in the city mate in full view of the populace at the summer solstice. "It is rumoured that even the pious pay them reverence in view of the ancient belief that they, not Adam and Eve, were our first ancestors" (p 73).

As time progresses and Lou begins to realize that her presence at the Cary house is more than a diverting summer job; rather, she is on a mission of discovery and of self-revelation.

> She understood technically and even emotionally the need to redefine objectives, but she could not understand why the period of redefinition had to be accompanied by depression, an existential screaming inside herself, a raucous interior voice that questioned not the project she was working on, but her own self. (p 82)

Lou realizes that in her current state she cannot justify herself to herself anymore. Previously, she had always used her penchant for order and list-making to make sense of things and to order the fragments of the lives of others. Now, here in the Cary mansion, with the almost palpable presence of the dead family, the grand but failed attempt to introduce gentility to the Ontario bush and with the looming, mysterious presence of the bear, she is incapable of doing this. Her thoughts reveal a general cultural and social malaise, a sense of utter isolation and of being disconnected from others, from her culture and from herself:

> You could take any life and shuffle it on cards, she thought bitterly, lay it out in a pyramid solitaire and it would have a kind of meaning . . . She would soon have to admit that up here, she was term-serving, putting in time until she died. Colonel Cary was surely one of the great irrelevancies of Canadian history and she was another. Neither of them was connected to anything. (p 84)

After this moment of epiphany, she admits that it "was years since she had had human contact" (p 92). We learn that she has been having a sterile physical relationship with the director of the institute for the last several years, and that their encounters frequently took place on a desk at the office. The thought of this affair now leaves Lou cold.

> . . . it horrified her to think of it. There was no care in the act, only habit and convenience. It had become something she was doing to herself. (p 93)

As she ponders this in front of a fire, the heat of which is fierce, she stands and strips, then lays down on the rug and begins to masturbate. The bear notices, approaches and begins to lick her:

> It felt very warm and good and strange. . . ."Bear, bear," she whispered, playing with his ears. The tongue that was muscular but also capable of lengthening itself like an eel found all her secret places. And like no human being she had ever known it persevered in her pleasure. When she came, she whimpered, and the bear licked away her tears. (p 93)

The next morning, Lou's memory of what she has done comes upon her suddenly, and strikingly. But instead of feeling perverse, she feels loved (p 94). That night, after dining on a pike that she herself caught, the bear repeats his act. As he does so, a note falls out of the book and Lou cries with joy:

> The offspring of a woman and a bear is a hero, with the strength of a bear and the cleverness of a man—old Finnish legend. (p 99)

Her "affair" with the bear continues as the summer becomes warmer and the river fills with power boats and water skiers. She professes her love for the bear. She cleans and polishes the house "because she and her lover needed peace and decency" (p 112). She continues to frolic with him in the water and to allow his now nightly, oral ritual. She chants incantations to him:

> Bear, I cannot command you to love me, but I think you love me. What I want is for you to continue to be and to be something to me. No more. Bear. (p 113)

Lou's passion for the bear is not like the sterile, opportunistic relationships she has had so far with men. What she feels for the bear is a "clean" and naive passion and when she reflects on her past, she realizes that the love she feels for the bear cannot be compared to any love she might ever have felt for any human. The bear is completely undemanding and simple. He asks nothing of her:

> She loved the bear. She felt him to be wise and accepting. She felt sometimes that he was God. He served her. As long as she made her stool beside him in the morning, he was ready whenever she spread her legs to him. He was rough and tender, assiduous, patient, infinitely, it seemed to her, kind. . . . There was a depth in him that she could not reach, could not probe and with her intellectual fingers destroy. (p 119)

Lou begins to lose herself in her ursophilia. She spends all her time with the bear, eating and drinking and continuing to defecate alongside him. One day she gets on her hands and knees and eats her cereal from the same bowl. She revels in her own body stinking of his musk. Then, one night, after a long swim together in the cool of the evening, she tries to mount him but cannot. He remains impassive and unaroused through the incident and she eventually gives up and goes to bed. The next morning, however, her memory is not sweet and peaceful; rather, she feels guilty, as though she has broken a taboo. She feels that she has gone too far and is disappointed in herself, feels foolish, empty and angry. She is a woman stinking of bestiality, "a woman who understood nothing, who had no use, no function" (p 122) and she has ugly dreams in which the Devil mocks her for her acts.

As the summer draws to a close, Lou knows that she must leave the island soon. One day, as she and the bear are sitting together, for the first time ever, Lou sees that the bear has an erection. Without pause, she takes off her sweater and gets down on all fours in front of him assuming the animal posture and offers herself to him. He reaches out one paw and rips the skin off her back:

> At first, she felt no pain. She simply leapt away from him. Turned to face him. He had lost his erection and was sitting in the same posture. She could see nothing, nothing, in his face to tell her what to do.
> Then she felt the blood running down her back and knew she had to run away. "Get out!" she shouted, pulling her sweater on to—well, warm her, cover it up, sop up the blood. "Get out." She drew a stick out of the fire and waved it at him, "Get out. Shoo. Time for bed. Go."
> Slowly and deliberately, he got up on all fours and waddled down the stairs.
> (p 132)

The next morning, the mirror reveals a long, red, congealing wound down the length of her back. Lou senses that something has gone between them and their relationship has been irrevocably changed. She begins to pack.

She allows the bear up to the study for one last night, and the two of them relax in front of the fire. But the sexual dimension has gone from their relationship. Lou feels innocent, a babe, clean, close to the earth. She has finally discovered "what the world is for. She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean. Clean and simple and proud" (p 137). Finally, Joe King arrives with a motorboat to pick up the bear and take him away for the winter. They get him into the boat, where he sits like a "fat, dignified old woman with his nose to the wind in the bow of the boat" (p 138). The bear does not look back as Joe King drives him away, nor did Lou expect him to.

Lou goes back into the house to finish cleaning. In summation, her actual work during the summer has revealed no special secrets, or hidden treasures. She decides to leave behind the notes on bears that she collected: she has no need of them anymore. She closes up the house, loads up the boat and heads up the river for Homer's place and her eventual return to Toronto. While on her way, she has time for reflection:

> She remembered the guilt, and a dream she had had where her mother made her write letters of apology to the Indians for having had to do with a bear and she remembered the claw that had healed guilt. She felt strong and pure. (p 140)

She bids farewell to Homer and heads south, back to the city. Gradually the warm, clean smells of the land and water are replaced with fumes and industrial odours. However, overhead, as she is driving, the Great Bear and his 37, 000 virgins keep her company.

Part 2

The Nature of the Beast

"what does it matter if we have any control over the senses?"
— the Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*

In an article on *Bear* published in *Canadian Literature*, critic Donald Hair quotes a Toronto Star interview with Engel in which she describes the inception of *Bear* and states that initially *Bear* was supposed to have been included in an anthology of erotic fiction. True to the Sadean paradigm, Engel admits to looking for that lonely, isolated spot where perverse things happen.

> I thought, "All pornography takes place in an isolated place," so I built my isolated place—the white octagonal house—then in walked a bear. I don't know where he came from, just from somewhere in my psyche.
> "Well it was no good as a pornographic story, but the idea was too good to waste, so it became a novel." (Hair 1982, 35)

Bear has been assigned to many different genres. For Margaret Laurence, it was a version of the ancient Quest theme (Verduyn 1995, 231); for Adele Wiseman, *Bear* reflects the classical journey in search of self, roots and meaning and reconciliation of the immanent unknown (1976, 6); for critic Margery Fee, *Bear* illustrates women's struggle to articulate female subjectivity in a context dominated by male models of selfhood (Verduyn 1995, 231). And indeed, *Bear* does seem to defy categorization, straddling as it does, many genres from the pastoral, with its emphasis on nature and the loss of innocence, to the fantastic, in its departure from conventionally received social reality (Verduyn 1995, 232). For Donald Hair, *Bear* is a typical romance—a search for a treasure guarded by a monster (p 34). *Bear* is also a novel about exploration and self-revelation: whatever treasure Lou is seeking, is hidden deep within. *Bear* is, too, a story of rapprochement between states of being—the social alienation of human society versus the integration of the natural world—and an exploration of the geography of the soul. The Lou who departs the smog and urban detritus of Toronto is not only lonely and isolated, she is unclean, and "degraded" (Wiseman 1976, 6). Her sense of self has been compromised by a series of meaningless sexual encounters with men and a one-time flirtation with love that saw her deserted for a younger, more malleable woman. The bear on the island turns out to be her natural soulmate, the king of the northern forest without a realm, reduced to the state of a curiosity, and the status of an abandoned pet. Wiseman (p 7) notes that in the bear, Lou is able to recognize a kindred spirit, as degraded and denatured as she is. For although a wild animal, the bear in this novel is almost cartoonish, fat and lumpy with small stupid eyes, living a preposterous life as a pseudo-dog, in a state of fallen grace. According to Wiseman:

> It is obvious, of course, that in one sense bear is her own chained and repressed inner drives, her over-controlled and therefore crippled animal nature. Her liberation is thus contingent on his own. (p 7)

If the bear represents Lou's handicapped psyche, the curious and erudite notes that fall like pennies from Heaven from the books in Cary's library function as codes, explaining and amplifying the significance of the mangy bear tethered in the yard, linking him to a greater past and cosmology. As a researcher and historian, it is Lou's business to discover the minutiae of others' lives, to delve into bygone eras in order to ferret out their secrets. The bear offers a challenge to this task: unlike artifacts that can be catalogued and listed, he is a living, but mute link to an inscrutable, perhaps undiscoverable past, a deeper reality. The notes, then, function as a bridge both between species and eras. They create a mythical halo around the bear, imbuing him with an almost cosmic importance: this is the signal to Lou that the bear has a significance that exceeds his odd, even eccentric presence on the island. To connect to the bear on more than a material level, she must connect to a long-forgotten, instinctively known past in which man and the natural world were one, where magical transformations were still possible and life still had a certain organic vitality (Cameron 1977-78, 85). In the figure of the bear she sees a link to another, deeper level of being. As he lies in front of her in the library one night, she sinks her feet into his thick pelt, and ponders "a depth in him she could not reach, could not probe and with her intellectual fingers destroy " (p 119). She seeks to commune with this pre-historical level and time, to connect to the mystery of creation, to a time and place where instinct ruled and the measured, false voices of civilization had not yet obtruded.

As Lou's relationship with the bear evolves, so does her relationship with nature. When Lou first arrives on the island, she feels a total stranger "conscious that every motion made a foreign sound, even her hands rubbing in her pockets for warmth" (p 31). However, little by little, nature encroaches upon her and seduces her, beginning with the sense of rebirth she feels leaving Toronto. Once on the island, she wakes up to a world "furred with late spring snow" (p 45). As she explores her domain further, she has more and more sensual experiences; the sun "rakes" her skin, she picks and eats wild mushrooms and even catches a fish. She swims in the icy water and explores the thick underbrush. Significantly, the garden that she plants fails, due to uncooperative weather and hungry wild animals, while the unkempt, unorganized, natural garden around her flourishes without any help at all. Once her love affair with the bear becomes full-blown, the "rest of the world [turns] into a meaningless knot, except for the landscape, which remained outside them, neutral, having its own orgasms of summer weather " (p 117). Nature remains impassive and non-judgmental, while at the same time almost insolently asserting itself as the established order is undermined (Cameron 1977-78, 86). And importantly, nature is utterly life affirming: Lou's island world is inhabited by a vast array of life, from exotic wild mushrooms to delicate flowers, shrubs and trees to animals, both large and small. Her own experience thus far has been life denying; her lover had forced her to have an abortion several years before and indeed her existence is "mole-like," taking place in dimly lit basements on desks covered with the memories of others upon which she and the institute director conducted their mechanical and loveless sexual encounters.

The bear is emblematic of the impassivity, the inscrutability and the timelessness of nature. His actions are not predicated on any moral or ethical structure; he simply acts according to instincts and completely without ulterior motives. In other words, he simply is. At first, Lou gingerly explores this apparently thoughtless, unpremeditated quality of nature, then eventually fully accepts it in its primitivism (Cameron 1977-78, p 87). She even dreams of joining the bear in that nebulous world as, at one point, she fantasizes about consummating her passion for him and having his children. However, any relationship implies a progression of sorts; Lou's relationship with the bear moves from a state of sexual innocence (because no man has touched her heart) to one of intimacy, albeit one-sided:

> Her awakened and unleashed need drives her beyond innocence to accept a sexual rebirth through him, her first total sexual ecstasy. The bear . . . completes her sexual reawakening as the mother animal completes the bringing to life of a newborn cub, by licking away its cawl. It is notable, by the way, that the acts of bestiality that take place occur within that magic circle, the mandalah of the house of Pennarth, which is Fowler's octagon in shape. [20] (Wiseman 1976, 7)

As the summer draws near, they are the rather strange rulers of their own bizarre kingdom, where she shuts the blinds during the day to discourage human visitors, she "smells of bear and her nails are broken" and together she and the bear laze in front of the fire each night.

In the end, however, the relationship cannot be sustained. Worlds collide and crash. Lou goes too far. She cannot contain the spiralling emotion that will lead her to try to transcend her physical, psychological, cultural and natural realities. In daring to offer herself to the bear as a mate, she tries to straddle the nebulous middle ground between the physically possible and the socially permissible: in her belief that she can make her ideal a reality, Lou misunderstands the purpose of the ideal in human experience (Cameron 1977-78, 91). The result of her misunderstanding and transgression is a thick gash on her back, which quickly brings her bizarre affair to an end. Despite the pain of her wound, her head is clear and she has no regrets. The bear's act was neither premeditated nor savage; he was simply acting as a bear does, instinctually and with the inscrutable motivation of animals. As she realizes that she cannot penetrate the mind of the bear, she also must admit the pointlessness of trying to do so and she also comes to recognize the potentially lethal result of the clash between her fantasies and reality. Where previously she naively believed that she could somehow crystallize her longing for solace and love in the insensible form of a bear, she now is forced to realize that the path to her ideal leads back to the human world. The gash is thus emblematic of the end of her search: she has found her limit, reaffirmed her humanity and must return to it. Nature's spell has been broken.

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[20] Pennarth translates as "Bear's Head."

So, despite the pain of her wound, something extremely important has transpired and an invaluable lesson learned. Lou is rejuvenated with a new sense of herself, and has gained some insight into the purpose of living.

> What had passed to her from him she did not know. Certainly it was not the seed of heroes, or magic, or any astounding virtue, for she continued to be herself. But for one strange, sharp moment she could feel in her pores and the taste of her own mouth that she knew what the world was for. She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean. Clean and simple and proud. (p 137)

Part 3

The Bear

... mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the
penultimate truth—penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is
beyond words, beyond images, beyond that bounding rim of the Buddhist Wheel of
Becoming. Mythology pitches the mind beyond that rim, to what can be
known but not told.
— Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

Throughout *Bear*, the constant mythological references, the appeal to legend, and even Lou's move from urban to rural setting all serve to underscore the bilevel workings of the narrative. On the literal level are the actual events of the story. On another level, the bear—a universal and potent figure in mythology and legend—and Lou's coupling with this figure, function as allegory: a search for self is resolved through an admittedly bizarre attempt at rapprochement with nature.

To the question "Why a bear?" critic Donald Hair notes the popular link between a bear's intelligence (the bear has a sly grin and reflects timeless wisdom) and his ability to walk upright. One of the notes that falls from a book tells us that the bear's "brain and nervous system [are] fairly developed . . . Senses acute. Cylindrical bones more similar to man's than those of other quadrupeds, esp. the femur. Therefore able to rear up and dance. Tongue has a longitudinal groove" (p 44). *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) mentions the bear's human-like walk and the uncanny similarity between a skinned bear and a human (p 87). In the bear, body and mind are thoroughly integrated, and the bear is, therefore, an appropriate creature to preside over Lou's renewal (Hair 1982, 38).

Bears have a long and rich cross-cultural mythical and allegorical significance and they are an important animal in the religious life of many people, most particularly people of northern North America and Eurasia. Clearly, Engel had done her homework and the choice of a bear to play the pivotal role in the novel cannot have been entirely a whim. In North America in particular, the bear is considered with a mixture of reverence and respect. When an Indian killed a bear, he was required to smoke a peace pipe and to ask the bear's forgiveness so that the bear's angry spirit would not return to seek vengeance. It was also believed that bears possessed curative powers. Thus American Indian shamans in some tribes would imitate the bear in order to possess those powers (Mercatante 1988, 115). The treatment of the remains of a bear is also of particular importance among hunting tribes. In some tribes, the bear itself is regarded as a divine creature who has assumed animal form in order to voluntarily offer itself as game. Thus, the bones receive a ritual burial to ensure that the bear will continue to make the sacrifice.

Verduyn tells us that bears are among women's nature archetypes and are found in poetry, needlework, craft art and fiction (p 130). Annis Pratt in an article entitled "Affairs with Bears" observes:

> Women have been marrying bears for a long time, after all: there are Snow White, Rose Red, and their Bear friend . . . Women turn to bears when men turn to cruelty . . . A corollary archetype occurring throughout women's fiction . . . is a figure I have termed the green-world lover, who appears as an alternative to socially acceptable suitors, husbands, and lovers. Full and satisfying erotic experiences rarely take place within the domestic enclosure: rather women's sexuality demands a wholly marginal, eccentric outsider . . .Through the green-world lover, women are enabled to transform their personalities by completing their eccentric and marginal relationship to culture. (Pratt 1987, 162-63)

In addition to the mythical status of the bear in cultures across the world, the bear has a special place in this culture as a beloved and virtually omnipresent children's toy (indeed there are probably millions of bears to be found in bedrooms all across Canada); he is a familiar and popular cartoon character; and he acts as a symbol of the Canadian wilderness. A number of sports teams across North America celebrate the strength and the mythical power of the bear by adopting various types of bears as their namesake and symbol.

The bear as a mythological and religious symbol also has negative connotations, exhibited by appeasement ceremonies and also by the fear which the bear inspires. Because the bear appears affable and jolly, his deadly strength and danger are somewhat masked. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* tells us that the bear is considered to have superhuman qualities and can see everything that humans do and hear everything that is said about him. Thus, as a precautionary measure against possible malice, hunters developed a specialized hunter's language.

Part 4

Bear as a Romantic Quest

A bear, confusingly, for bearing.
– Marian Engel, *The Glassy Sea*

It cannot be an accident that Engel chose the Romantic movement as Colonel Cary's preferred literary genre and Lord Byron as its most noteworthy representative; the former is the intellectual and literary movement most likely to be sympathetic to exploration of self-identity via bestiality, and the latter was one of the principal English figures of the movement and a known ursophile who also kept a pet bear. The Romantic tradition, characterized by an intense passion, a search for the sublime, an emphasis on personal revelation and a deep interest in landscape, provides a natural prism through which to view the wild, northern retreat of Cary Island, with its dense bush, its wild river and murderous winters. And indeed, one of the principal preoccupations of the Romantic writers was the spiritual link and relation between humanity and the natural world. The Romantics championed notions of individual creativity and promoted discussions of dreams, visions and love. The theme of the exiled hero was a common one and, importantly, the Romantics rebelled against classicism in its myriad forms, be it authoritarianism, human moderation or conventional morality.

The lush, summer world on Cary Island is a perfect setting for Romantic heroes and exiles, roles which Lou gradually assumes. She begins to shun the company of humans, going to the store as rarely as possible and shutting herself and the bear inside during the long summer days when the river is full of vacationers. Her identity attains a certain fluidity; as time progresses, she melds more and more with her environment, learning how to pick wild fruit and berries. She learns to fish and even her body changes, slimming and becoming browner, more in touch with the physical world. Importantly, her personal body scent changes: she begins to smell of bear and she is happy to do so.

In her readings, Lou becomes fascinated by the Romantics: to her they are "morbid geniuses" (p 92). Her affair with the bear becomes her own search for Romantic self-expression, self-creation and the sublime. Throughout the novel, her admiration for Romantic ideals pervades her thoughts. "Were the Romantic poets the only people who saw?" (p 95) she asks herself at one point as she revels in the beauty of the morning, then answers "yes" to her own question. As she ponders the link between Cary, Trelawny and the bear, she articulates a classic Romantic dilemma: the apparent irreconcilability between the desirable and the achievable (Gadpaille 1982, 153). Lou spends a great deal of her mental power trying to understand the links between and the meaning of things. Her task of minute cataloguing, the scrutiny demanded by each article left behind by Colonel Cary, and her attempts to commune with the bear all leave her poised for an intimate glimpse into the Romantic soul, and "[pave] the way for a descent into her own" (Gadpaille 1982, 151). In setting up her odd little household with her lumbering, hirsute lover, Lou capitalizes on the Romantic abjuration of conventional morality.[21] She realizes that she has broken a taboo but she does not feel guilty; indeed, quite the opposite. She feels returned to a state of innocence, a kind of logical conclusion to the process of rebirth that began when she left Toronto.

The allegorical structure of *Bear* underlies another quest—the search for authenticity in a world of artifice. We have already seen how nature on Cary's island abhors attempts at control; the natural world triumphs over the world of intellect at all points. Throughout the novel, nature expresses itself with utter and sincere abandon and resists all attempts at domestication; nor is it subject to gentrified rules of behaviour. It is, in other words, relentlessly authentic. And it is this distilled, authentic experience that Lou is searching for in her own life. Her search for authenticity of experience germinates in her reading of E. J. Trelawny, the chronicler of Byron and Shelley, a copy of whose works she finds in the library.[22] She had never read the book before because "someone, some scholar had told her it was a piece of rubbish . . . But what amusing rubbish this is! What a man!" (p 90). Just as nature flouts the order of a cultivated garden, so Lou flouts the imposition of arbitrary critical standards to her reading, and in so doing discovers a delightful truth about Trelawny: "HE SPEAKS IN HIS OWN VOICE" (p 91). This honesty is a revelation to Lou, so used to following the dictates of society and the directives of the institute director. She craves an authentic experience and despite the fact that Trelawny is an "appalling blowhard" and a disgusting man who "turned the shroud back to have a look at Byron's lame foot" (p 91) he nevertheless speaks to an essential part of her that craves to also flout convention and imposed order. It is shortly after this revelation that Lou's affair with the bear begins. Indeed, Trelawny seems to hold a pivotal place in the sensibility of the novel, as he serves as the voice piece for a movement and spirit that captivated and perhaps even consumed Colonel Cary, whose quest for his own personal Shangri-La in the wilds of northern Ontario in the 1800s was nothing if not Romantic. Lou senses the importance of Trelawny as well, not only on a practical level, but also as a point in a triangle—"Trelawny. Colonel Cary. The bear. There was some connection, some unfingerable intimacy among them, some tie between longing and desire and the achievable" (p 91). Margery Fee suggests that the ability to speak in one's own voice is particularly important for those who, like Lou, lack a voice (Verduyn 1995, 133). Throughout the novel, it is clear that Lou's existence has been one that required validation from others; the focus of her mole-like life has been the cataloguing and distilling of other lives, other experiences. With the bear, she makes a move toward finding her voice and her self. For Fee, this move indicates her desire to re-appropriate her female desire and sexuality (Verduyn 1995, 133).

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[21] Indeed, Lord Byron was himself a lifelong victim of persecution on moral grounds and caused a scandal when his half-sister, Augusta, gave birth to a daughter, almost assuredly his.

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[22] Edward John Trelawny (1792-1881) published his *Record of Shelley, Byron and the Author* in 1858. The book provided a lively, if often inaccurate, portrait of his friendship with the two Romantic poets. Lou also notes in her musings that it was Trelawny who bought the boat from which Shelley fell to his death by drowning. She also recounts that he burned the body and saved the heart.

Part 5

The Special Place of Animals

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
— Genesis, 1:30

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
— W. B. Yeats, "Leda and the Swan"

The role of animals in Western culture is a fluid one that has evolved over the ages. From the uncomplicated relationship between early humans and animals to their relegation to inferior status in the Christian hierarchy to today's animal rights movements and the transplanting of animals organs into humans, animals have played a pivotal role in the evolution in the form and substance of Western culture.

The mythical coupling of humans with animals is an ancient and pan-cultural motif. In large parts of Southeast Asia, Australasia and North America, the very origins of indigenous peoples were attributed to primordial sexual encounters between women and dogs (Serpell 1986, 26). From the very earliest times, mankind looked to the animal both as an explanation of its place on earth, but also as a means to allow that existence to continue. Anthropologist Joseph Campbell notes that early humans and animals shared a deep bond based upon the unique nature of their relationship: that is, humans' dependence on animals for the very life of the tribe. The specialness of the relationship was marked by highly ritualized ceremonies designed to both thank the animals for giving their flesh to the hunters, and to appease them: if they were not appeased, they would not appear and widespread hunger would result. Clearly, the relationship was not one of mutual dependence. The animal kingdom can easily survive without humans, but the inverse was not and is not true. As a result of this unequal relationship, the notion that animals have a supernatural power because they possessed the power of life and death over humans was popular in pre-Christian times. Hunting tribes that rely on animals for food have always thought of animals as equals, sometimes superiors, and show their respect for animals in rituals and ceremonies. Shamans, for example, often take on the spirit of some animal species that will be their supporters or teachers (Campbell 1988, 75).

The notion of possession by animal spirits or indeed of actual miscegenation between animals and humans is incarnated in both ancient Greek and Latin mythologies in the form of a number of creatures who freely populate the mythical landscape: the satyr, mythical half man-half goat, centaur (half man-half horse) and minotaur (half man-half bull). Indeed, Zeus himself, the head of the panoply of Greek gods, as well as many other dwellers on Mount Olympus, frequently came to earth and took on animal forms in order to chase and seduce humans. Serpell tells us that mythical seduction scenes were sometimes enacted on stage in ancient Greek theatre and featured actual coitus between animals and humans (Serpell 1986, 27). In addition to exotic, hybrid creatures like the satyrs and centaurs, ancient Greek and Roman mythology often featured the transformations of humans into animals.[23] One well known work by Apuleius (*born c.* AD 123) is the aforementioned *Metamorphoses* (more commonly known as *The Golden Ass*) which tells the story of a certain Lucius who is turned into an ass during an incident of witchcraft which goes awry. Lucius undergoes all sorts of ordeals: petty cruelty at the hands of tyrannical masters, indignities, twists of fate and, of course, intercourse with an animal-loving woman who conceives a wondrous desire for him (p 253). This woman, the wife of a nobleman, arranges for a romantic tryst with him one evening, including a fine repast and wine, and she even moistens his nostrils with frankincense. Lucius the ass worries that he may injure the woman, but " . . . she would push closer with a mad thrust, grab my spine, and cling in an even closer embrace, until, by Hercules, I believed that I did not even have enough to fulfill her desire and that the Minotaur's mother might have had reason to take her pleasure with her mooing paramour." (p 259)[24]. Apuleius' use of man to animal transmogrification is not uncommon: animal actors play a central role in many mythologies around the world and are the source of inspiration for a very large number of fables in European literature (Penguin 1977, 84). The bestiary, a mediaeval didactic genre in prose or verse, used animals as symbolic types and was enormously popular in Europe from the 12th to 14th centuries.

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[23] One Greek myth relates the tale of Callisto, a young maiden with whom Zeus fell in love. Hera became furiously jealous and turned her into a bear after she bore a son. Later, when the son was grown, Hera brought Callisto to him, intending that he should shoot her. (He of course was ignorant of the true identity of the bear.) Zeus, however, snatched her away and placed her among the stars where she became the constellation the Great Bear. Later her son was also placed there as the Lesser Bear. A furious Hera then persuaded Poseidon to forbid bears to descend into the ocean like the other stars. Thus, the bears are the only two constellations that never set below the horizon.

The seemingly harmless pagan practices of animal and nature worship would not last long under the onslaught of the warriors of Christianity, and by the middle ages, the place of animals in the moral and ethical universe was inverted. In the hierarchical and monolithic Judeo-Christian world, mankind is at the top rung, as it were, of the celestial ladder, and animals are clearly a subspecies. The anthropocentric notion of the universe was reflected in the Christian hierarchy and also in pre-scientific thought which posited that the earth, and not the sun, was at the centre of the universe. Extreme religious and, consequently sexual, orthodoxy was the rule of the day. St. Thomas Aquinas (*c.* 1225-1274), the principal theologian of medieval Europe, consolidated fears of sexuality and purposefully attempted to discredit sexuality by expanding upon Augustine's proposition that the sexual organs were designed by the Creator solely for reproduction. Thus, in one fell, dogmatic and influential swoop, all types of sexuality, including heterosexual sex for pleasure, oral and anal intercourse, and bestiality were considered not only deviations but also heresy (Tannahill 1992, 160), and were punishable offences.[25] The sin of bestiality was considered even more heinous than non-procreative sex because having consort with the animals undermined the most basic tenet of the Christian Church—man's prominent place at the top of the chain of creation and the corollary that there is a hierarchical distinction between humans and animals, culture and nature (Serpell 1986, 125). Where before the Church had been relatively lenient to a wide variety of pagan cults and practices, the new orthodoxy and the rise of the Inquisition saw a brutal dispossession, excommunication and often execution of those who did not toe the official Church line in matters of belief (and indeed even those who did were not safe from the excesses of this particularly nasty time in human history). James Serpell notes that during the Inquisition, in the heat of alleged ritualistic, orgiastic excess, witches and sorcerers were believed to make pacts with the Devil, who was usually disguised as an animal, such as a goat, a dog or a cat. Renaissance Europe continued the mediaeval tradition of persecution of those found guilty of bestiality, or even suspected of having committed it; no matter how dubious the evidence, those found guilty were publicly and severely punished.[26] Men and the animals with whom they committed the act (ranging from pigs to cattle to donkeys) were publicly tried for sodomy and burned together. "In 1679, a woman and a dog were hanged together for the offence on Tyburn Hill outside London" (Serpell 1986, 27). Britain made bestiality a capital offence in 1534, and it remained as such for over 300 years.The disgust and fear that the act of bestiality engendered were expressed pithily by one 17th Century pundit: "It turns man into a very beast, makes man a member of a brute creature" (p 126). In the same light, pet keeping was also considered in a heretical light even though for opposite reasons—it elevated the pet to the status of the human or half-human. This rapprochement between species was simply too radical and blasphemous for either the secular or the religious authorities to accept and thus the poor animal, in its mute, unreflective innocence, came to embody a serious threat to the very basis of religious and philosophical belief (p 127).

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[24] The half-man, half-bull minotaur is the offspring of a love affair between Pasiphae, the wife of King Minos of Crete, and a bull.

[25] The following is a list of Aquinas' top sexual sins in descending order of magnitude: bestiality, sodomy (homosexuality), non-observance of proper methods of coitus (for example, using artificial aids, or anal or oral intercourse), masturbation, incest, adultery, seduction and ordinary, garden variety fornication (Tannahill 1992, 272).

Joseph Campbell observes a telling difference between the relationship of early man and modern man with respect to animals: modern, industrial man thanks God (or perhaps modern technology or perhaps just his own cleverness) for the food he is about to eat, while hunting man thanked the animal itself. However, as Campbell observes, the wholesale, sacrilegious slaughter of buffalo on the North American plains in the 19th century turned the buffalo from a "thou" to an "it" (Campbell 1988, 78). Thus, even modern English syntax shows the shift in the view of animals as partners and life-givers to a view in which nature in reified, and becomes a commodity to be exploited.

Ancient mythology and literature made free and uninhibited use of bestiality. However, as time passed and ancient societies evolved into modern ones, the nature of the kind of perverse sexuality exemplified by acts such as bestiality changed, just as modern man's attitude toward nature changed. Furthermore, as discussed above, sexuality came to be used more and more as a pointed political or anti-establishment barb. One unusual work which exemplifies this change is *Gamiani ou deux nuits d'excès*, published in 1833 but, to this day, of uncertain authorship. As Marian Engel read French well, it is possible that she was familiar with this work.

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[26] In Renaissance Europe, bestiality was referred to euphemistically as *offensa cujus nominatio crimen est*—the offence which it is a crime to name.

Part 6

Breaking the Taboo

Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing.
— Deuteronomy, 14:3

Immediately upon a person's death, among the Usen Barok of New Ireland, a taboo called *lebe* goes into effect: no gardening can be done, no fires can be made, and no arguments will be tolerated until the conclusion of the final mourning feast, up to a week later. It is also forbidden to utter a cry of lament until the mourners hear the first squeals of the pigs being slaughtered for the first feast.
— *The Encyclopedia of Religion*

Taboo is defined in the 1980 Webster's Dictionary as "forbidden to profane use or contact because of supposedly dangerous supernatural powers" and "banned on the grounds of morality or taste." The *Encyclopedia of Religion* expands this definition to emphasize the social aspect: "Taboo is a social prohibition or restriction sanctioned by suprasocietal (innate) means or a socially sanctioned injunction alleged to have the force of such a prohibition. Taboo stands at the intersection of human affairs and the forces of a larger universe" (p 233). Taboos are global and can be applied to a myriad of practices or items: food, names, kin relationships, mourning and sexuality are aspects of cultures that are often governed by taboos. Taboos imply a cultural imperative and are therefore imposed only on those things that are thinkable in the context of a culture (there would be little point in proscribing that which never happens). Certainly for early mankind, with its high infant mortality rate and short life span, sexuality because it was linked to the survival of the species was one of the first activities controlled by taboos. Such taboos took the form of impositions and limits on sexuality and reproduction. Throughout the ages, taboos around a wide variety of human sexual practices have existed, ranging from taboos related to menses and sexual contact with nursing mothers to incest and, of course, bestiality. Aside from the earlier-noted apparent sexual liberty of the ancient Greeks and Romans, many societies, even if they believe in the mythical status of animals, prohibit the actual practice of bestiality. Indeed, bestiality is specifically prohibited in the Old Testament and the Talmud and dating from the time of the Inquisition, Christianity has considered it a sin. Thus, the sexual activity in *Bear* is a serious social and religious transgression, in contrast to the merely disturbing (to some) activities in *Histoire d'O* and *Exit to Eden*, and as such is more than a slap in the face of Puritan prudery.

Roy Wagner in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (p 234) notes that around the turn of the century, Western writers drew conspicuous examples of concepts from primitive religions in an attempt to explore the psychic unity of mankind and to prove their hypothesis that all cultures everywhere pass through the same evolutionary stages. Taboo played the role of the archetypal religious rule.[27] Among Western sociologists of the French and British schools and principally due to the influence of Emile Durkheim, taboo came to mean almost solely a social restriction or mandate. The religious or supernatural connotations were significantly downplayed by Durkheim, for whom the religious and supernatural were the means by which society worshipped itself (Wagner 234). However, even if those suprasocietal forces around us are nothing but cultural constructs, taboo nevertheless implies something more weighty than a "strict rule." Taboos refer to extraordinary circumstances in which social transgressions "are referred directly to the religious manifestations of the social rather than to a secular authority" (Wagner 234). Paul Abramson and Steven Pinkerton in a recently published study on the nature of human sexuality, *With Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality* (1995), examine sexual restrictions and taboos in this light, and contend that one of the driving forces behind the evolution of sexual taboos in Western culture was the desire for social control. Abramson and Pinkerton identify the imposition of strict sexual laws as one of the first steps toward achieving social control through demographics. Historically, if a group wants to control how adults spend their time, or maximize its numbers, the first step is the implementation of taboos. The first effect of such imposition, according to Abramson and Pinkerton, is the perception of the primacy of work and societal duties (in the case of the West, these concepts have been neatly instilled by the Protestant Reformation); the second is the strict enforcement of sexual intercourse within marriage and the concomitant repression of alternative forms of sexual pleasure, which become taboo (p 52). The taboo, then, comes to represent a hedonistic sexual pleasure, antithetical and threatening to established economic and social order and moral probity.

However, for Wagner, the prohibitive aspect of taboos is only half the equation and implies only a partial understanding of the phenomenon. For Wagner, taboo is distinct from established and codified law in the degree to which the taboo object or practice becomes a symbol or a fetish of the prohibition itself (p 234). "Taboo is not so much a system of regulations as it is a scheme of negative differentiation, in which the fact of prohibition and the prohibited act or object itself obscure the reasons for prohibition" (p 234). This process of "negative differentiation" serves to control and channel human activity and social intercourse, specifying what may and may not be done and to whom (p 234).

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[27] The word *taboo* is related to the Polynesian word *tabu*, itself a variation on *tapu* and the Hawaiian *kapu*. It reached the West through Captain Cook.

Georges Bataille identifies the great erotic potential of many taboos, which, according to him, exist to thwart desire; the transgression of a taboo becomes the domain of eroticism. The erotic for Bataille is that within us that calls our very being into question (1962, 11). Bataille divides time into two specific categories related to our relationship with the world. He speaks of profane time, which is ordinary time, when work and chores are done and taboos are respected. Then there is sacred time, which is a special time for celebrations and the breaking of taboos (1962, 257). American feminist writer and film-maker Susie Bright echoes Bataille's thoughts on taboos. For Bright, whatever is beyond social comprehension and "typical" understanding becomes taboo (Bright 202). Bright remarks on what she perceives as the highly sexualized nature of taboos:

> Any taboo subject is often a well of sexual dynamite. Sexual taboos involve catharsis; they are not about butterflies and daisies and pretty walks along the coast . . . but typically our must powerful fantasies have to do with images that are dominating, violent, unequal and cruel. . . [you must] realize that your sexual fantasies are not some kind of *McGuggey's Reader* on how to love—they're sex. And sex takes anxiety and prohibition and all these things we become numb or rationalist or linear with—sex takes them and just rips them out of your clit! It handles that kind of material in a completely non-rational manner. I'm not surprised that holocaust imagery would be the hot porno topic in Israel, anymore than I'd be surprised that religion and history and war in any culture you visit have had a tremendous impact on the sexuality and what is considered "exciting" and titillating in that culture. (p 202)

The breaking of a taboo involves a willful, deliberate act. Once the taboo is broken, the transgressor enters the erotic world, which is a mental state, an interior consciousness, an inner experience. He satisfies a desire and attempts to vanquish the taboo. Thus, the taboo also implies inner turmoil—it presupposes the transgressor in conflict with himself (Bataille 1962, 256). In the world of *Bear*, Lou's transgression is that of the mediaeval heretics who dared to accept animals on the same plane as humans. And indeed, she elevates the bear above the level of humans in sexual contact with him, in her fantasizing about bearing his offspring, and in her references to him as a god. After her first transgression, there is no going back; she is only mildly alarmed at her actions, but then "pinches her conscience here and there to see if she felt evil. She felt loved" (p 94). Nevertheless, as an acknowledgment of her transgression, "for her sins, [she] went to the garden and worked for an hour, painfully weeding" (p 94). Lou becomes increasingly comfortable in the transgressive erotic realm which she has entered and she begins to assume postures that liken her to her animal lover: she shares his bowl; she defecates beside him; she plays with him and she continues her sexual relationship with him. Her physical and mental isolation from other humans ensures that these acts are not public and in the context of her own evolving moral universe, not wrong. However, she cannot remain forever in her erotic cocoon. She soon starts to feel more guilty about her actions, and one night dreams about two cartoon-like characters, known as Grinty and Greedy; Grinty wants to eat her breasts off, but Greedy thinks that she will eat them first. She wakes, stiff, cold and guilty (p 116). Then, the morning after her unsuccessful attempt to mount the bear, she wakes up with the realization that she has broken a taboo. She feels empty and angry with herself, a "woman stinking of bestiality." That night, the Devil appears in her dreams to mock her: "It wasn't very witty," said the Devil in the night, "to commit an act of bestiality with a tatty old pet. . . . Bestiality's all right in itself, but you have to do it with style. . . . Be a good girl now and go away. No stars will fall in your grasp" (p 123). This dream presages the end of Lou's relationship with the bear: bestiality is a powerful taboo and the gap between her and the bear and between civilization and the natural world is necessarily too great. When she offers herself to him, the bear could have easily ended her life with a single swipe of his paw (as indeed he could have done at any time during her stay on the island). However, instead of killing her, he in effect sends her on her way home with a rough blessing, and the wound he inflicts becomes her salvation, the pain a transformative punishment. Joseph Campbell, in the *Power Of Myth*, comments on the healing, cathartic power of the wound:

> The troubadours celebrate the agony of the love, the sickness the doctors cannot cure, the wounds that can be healed only by the weapons that delivered the wound. . . . The wound is the wound of my passion and the agony of my life for this creature. The only one who can heal me is the one who delivered the blow. That's a motif that appears in symbolic form in many medieval stories of the lance that delivers a wound. It is only when that lance can touch the wound again that the wound can be healed. (p 195)

In *Bear* the lance is a claw but the effect of the wound is similar. The taboo, once broken, shows Lou the way back to the centre of what it is that makes her human. It shows her that delineating mark that reaffirms her knowledge and her purpose. Thus, the bear is both Lou's perdition and her salvation: he is her perdition in the sense that he is the instrument by which she breaks a taboo, and he inflicts a serious wound upon her; her salvation in that he shows her the way back to herself:

> She remembered guilt and a dream she had had where her mother made her write letters of apology to the Indians for having had to do with a bear and she remembered the claw that had healed guilt. She felt strong and pure. (p 140)

Lou's relationship with the bear harks to the pre-Christian, pagan time evoked by Joseph Campbell in that it inverts the Christian order, and recreates the non-hierarchical naturalistic world in which mankind pays obeisance to animals for the gifts they give us. In the novel, the bear is her equal, and in some senses, her superior. Thus, Lou's breaking of the taboo is right and necessary and perhaps the only way that she could have found the way back to herself. However, some see no salvation in Lou's acts: critic Elizabeth Bradley considers Lou's bestiality a betrayal of the natural order of relationships in favour of her own selfish, personal motivations. For Bradley, the bear exists as a "holy" beast, a totemic presence who brings Lou into communion with a state of innocence through her own partly instinctive, partly learned rapprochement with nature (Bradley 1987, 41). But Lou fails to observe a basic, moral propriety as she attempts to force on the bear the same "rape of selfhood" that has been inflicted on her by the various tawdry and unsatisfactory relationships she has had in her life. Thus, in *Bear* the reader is put in rather a delicate position: on the one hand we realize that Lou is demoralized and lost and we feel sorry for her; on the other, Lou's transgression is flagrant and summoning sympathy is perhaps a hard stretch for many readers.

Clearly, animal sexuality is different from the sexuality of humans, in that we cannot ascribe an erotic element to the former. Although almost all creatures sexually reproduce, it is only humans (as far as we know) for whom eroticism becomes a mental journey or a search for self. And in so far as animals are motivated by instinct, we assume that taboos cannot exist for them. We humans, however, intellectualize our most basic functions and create culturally determined barriers around them which straddle the known and unknown world. Taboos legitimate the higher sensibility of a culture; they serve as a glue that keeps the tribe together and thus maintain the body politic in a spiritually sound and healthy state. If the erotic is that within us which calls our very being into question, it is the taboo that provides an answer to the question, that sends us back to ourselves and that helps to ensure that the unthinkable remains, except in a few instructional cases, the unthinkable.

Chapter Four

A Reconsideration

Il faut toujours revenir à de Sade,
c'est à dire à l'homme naturel, pour expliquer le mal.
— Charles Baudelaire

Nevertheless, we will have critics, contradictors and
enemies without a doubt: it is a danger to love men,
a crime to enlighten them.
— the Marquis de Sade in the preface to *Aline et Valcour*

In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen, a contemporary of Abelard and Heloise and a great Benedictine abbess, interpreted the myth of Adam's sin as a failure of eros. Adam was banished from Eden not because he discovered nudity and sex, but because he did not enjoy deeply enough the delights of the earth. . . . Recently, Matthew Fox, a Dominican theologian, was silenced by Vatican celibates for his endorsement of Hildegard of Bingen's interpretation of the Eden myth and for his eros-positive creation spirituality.
— Robert T. Francoeur, professor and Catholic Priest

Introduction

Despite our best efforts, defining terms in the pornography debate is very difficult; likewise, assigning a social value to pornography, the problem being, of course, the widely divergent views about the subject, from the pro-pornography stance of many writers and artists, to the dithering of various governments who probably, and understandably, would prefer not to deal with the subject at all, to the virulent opposition voiced by some special interest groups and many feminists. Clearly, the degree of tolerance allowed pornography will continue to be an ongoing and endless question, because the pornography debate underscores much larger, much broader concerns: the nature and function of art, the status of women in the pornographic world and the need for censorship in a culture which purports to protect freedom of speech and expression.

Art, long suspect in the West, is generally considered to have great powers to corrupt. Critics of pornography fear that many of us have an infantile urge to imitate whatever we see, and pornography is thus particularly troubling, capable as it might be of pushing us over the edge; absolute porn corrupts absolutely. (Such critics exclude themselves from the weak-mindedness of the rabble, of course. In this respect, they are much like the rich gentlemen who visited the erotic artifacts from Pompeii over 100 years ago—immune to the ruinous influence of the sight of giant Priapuses, unlike the rest of us who would almost surely turn to pillars of salt.) However, if sexually charged art has such powerful, affective powers for evil, surely it has equal powers for good. Thus, a simple and effective counter-attack to the effects of pornography would be an afternoon spent reading *Heidi*, a contemplation of a Matisse painting, or a bowl of popcorn and an afternoon in front of the telly watching Julie Andrews and the wholesome antics of the Von Trapp family.[28]

It would seem clear, however, that neither culture nor art functions in such simplistic, reductive ways. Art must be understood as an expression of a consciousness and of self-revelation; thus, those who are in favour of censorship must decide whose consciousness will take primacy. Artistic visions, which have a tendency to be iconoclastic and subversive when placed in opposition to the status quo give rise to many questions. Can a pluralistic, democratic society afford to allow the voices and ethics of one group to supersede all others? And granted that pornography is intensely upsetting and offensive to many people, how can a democratic society which is opposed to censorship ensure that the sensibilities of all people are protected? Is there simply a price to be paid for living in a democracy with its cornerstone principles of freedom of speech and expression? And what about the interplay between the personal and the public—to what extent should historically conservative, essentialist structures like Church and State, which protect "traditional" privilege, be allowed to promote their agenda? Putting aside the usual cant about liberty and free will repeated by most Western political parties, ours is a culture which in some ways is undeniably free and fluid, yet in others is constrictive, puritanical and increasingly less private. Indeed, the pornography debate has conflated the hazy distinctions between the personal and the public with somewhat disastrous results for the notions and practice of personal liberty.

One of the principal issues in the pornography debate has been the charge levelled by some feminists that pornography degrades and objectifies women, and denies their humanity and dignity. However, as we have discussed, the effects on society of pornographic images and literature, while endlessly studied, have never been conclusively proven or decided upon. The charge of objectification of women is relativized by the fact that men are no less objectified than women in this culture; indeed, objectification would seem to be an inherent practice in a culture where virtually everything is for presentation and sale. And even conservative anti-pornography pundits have never been able to prove that pornography is directly linked to any other social ill, like violence or sexual assault.

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[28] But clearly not time spent reading the Bible, full as it is of harlots, like Bathsheba and Mary Magdalene, masturbation (Onan), incest, jealousy, murder, apostasy, wars, not to mention sensuality: the "Song of Songs," the 22nd book of the Old Testament has itself been the subject of repression and censorship at various points in history. Christians have a long history of discomfort with the work. Robert Francoeur tells us how St. Jerome interpreted it as song of praise to virgins for mortifying their flesh. Other Christians were given a bowdlerized version to read, in which asexuality replaced the vivid language and metaphors replaced the celebration of the flesh. The Christian was then exhorted to take nourishment from Christ's two breasts; the Old and New Testament (Francoeur 1992, 164).

Censorship has always been and will no doubt continue to be a thorny topic and all thinking people must ask "Who of us has the right to decide what others may read and see?" We must be constantly vigilant about who we allow to set the artistic and moral agenda of the province and nation. Fortunately, most of us not in government or in radical religious or feminist groups realize both that humans are complicated and paradoxical creatures, and that the relationship of art to culture is intricate. The pornography debate, then, will continue to rage, as society continually defines and redefines the nature of art, the need for censorship, and the politics of sex.

Part 1

But Is It Art?

I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's;
I will not reason and compare; my business is to create.
— William Blake, "Jerusalem"

It is one of the effects, perhaps one of the functions, of literature to arouse desire, and I can discover no ground for saying that sexual pleasure should not be among the objects of desire which literature presents to us, along with heroism, virtue, peace, death, food, wisdom, God etc.
— Lionel Trilling

. . .censorship, whatever it is, seems to me to be a monstrosity, something worse than murder; an assassination attempt on thought; a crime of lèse-âme. The death of Socrates still weighs on the human species.
— Gustave Flaubert

According to critic Camille Paglia, the answer to the question "But is it Art?" is a resounding "yes!" Pornography is art, "sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant. Its glut and glitter are a Babylonian excess. . . Pornography forces a radical reassessment of sexual value, nature's bequest and our tarnished treasure" (1994, 67). For Paglia, pornography and art have a symbiotic relationship. Pornography represents the daemonism of sex and nature; art is the prism through which these things are viewed, and if not tamed, then ordered. Art renders brutality bearable by mirroring ugliness and violence (1990, 14). For Paglia, the artist's role is vital—he or she is an iconoclast, a pioneer, a breaker of boundaries, a visionary.

Despite Paglia's insistent and colourful lionizing of pornography, however, North American society is at best distrustful of art and balks when it comes to pornographic art. While what is considered to be high culture is generally more immune to censorship and anti-pornography propaganda because of its appeal to a limited audience, sexual representations in popular culture are very worrisome to the man on the street and the politicians and religious leaders who seek to either represent him or to save his soul.[29] The fact that Anne Rice published most of her overtly erotic fiction under a pseudonym is a testament to the power of the anti-sex lobby, which she rightly feared could have effectively sabotaged her more mainstream career. In any case, she got the last laugh—as noted previously, her vampire chronicles were full of sexuality, including taboo sexuality like homoeroticism, and her erotic fiction is openly and commercially available. In *The Jaguar and the Anteater*, Bernard Arcand describes how, in each epoch, society designates a particular category of people to be the ones that must be protected from public displays of sexuality for fear of the dire consequences. As noted above in Chapter I, women, children and the poor were forbidden access to the Secret Museum for fear of the corrupting powers of the works found therein. It was felt that only educated gentlemen were capable of the restraint necessary in the face of the ultra-sexuality of the Pompeiian artifacts. And beyond class and gender distinctions, loomed the ever present threat of economic upheaval. It was not only that these groups were too delicate to deal with pornographic images, there was also the implicit fear that contact with pornography could incite them to dreams of sexual liberation and then to dreams of other kinds of equality, like social and financial. Eventually, the entire social order, even civilization, could collapse.

However, with time, the old paradigms have changed and sexually explicit material enjoys mass availability. Pornography has thus transmogrified from a social fact to a social problem (Arcand 1993, 118). Women are supposed to be simply dismissive of or disgusted by pornography—the vulnerable one is elsewhere:

> The most likely target and victim of pornography today is unquestionably male, not necessarily young, or of humble origins, but certainly a bit weak-minded, a bit wild, often brutal. He is the new planetary village idiot: every day he learns how easy violence is, and it is on him that pornography can have the most threatening effect for the community. . . . a world that thinks of itself as a social democracy can conceive of no more terrible threat than that of the barbarian at the gate, waiting to bring in revolution and the destruction of social order. The monster's aspects are gross, vulgar, racist, skinheaded, fascist, and brutal, and countless times it has manifested an alarming capacity to adjust reality to fantasy, either by sheer madness or by brute force. This is the new vulnerable clientele among whom pornography can do the most damage. That's why people try to

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[29] There is also a general and genuine mistrust of aficionados of high culture (read: intellectuals) in North American society, particularly in the United States where, for example, populist politicians and "men of the people" have tended to do far better than their well-educated counterparts. The fact that the current American president, Bill Clinton, was a Rhodes scholar was generally glossed over by most media and certainly was not used as a selling point in his election. I would contend that Canadians on the average are not nearly so hostile to intellectuals, despite the policies of our current provincial government and the fact that Alberta's minister of advanced education has no advanced education.

> prohibit it, in order to protect the world from these new barbarians by protecting the barbarian from something that would make him more barbaric still.
>
> (pp 118-19)

This image of the depraved, brutal male who uses sex as a battering ram against the frail retaining wall of the middle-class is an apt one for our times. The middle-class has made many efforts to capture and subdue this dangerous fellow: we take down and publish the license plates of those caught trying to solicit sex from a prostitute; we have John schools; national election campaigns are fought on the battleground of the hearth and home, with "Family Values" as the rallying mantra: we "protect" ourselves by giving outrageously broad powers to the censors and customs officials. Indeed, the censorship and seizure of sexually explicit material at Canada Customs is an insidious and constant insult of which very few people are aware. In all of this, despite the different main players, things have not changed much at all: "in the eyes of the powerful, pornography is always disturbing when it falls into other people's hands" (Arcand 1993, 118).

An adjunct to the debate is the nature of the pornographic image itself. Pornography frightens because it speaks to something human but usually the non-intellectual and non-spiritual. The puritanical core of this culture insists upon the separation of the mind and body, the Apollonian in conflict with the Dionysian; the former is valorized, the latter vilified. Governments spend millions of dollars analyzing pornography and positing various theories about its effect on the body politic, and devote time and effort to devising formulas and prescriptions and policies to govern its availability. One of the results of all this legalistic and moralistic hoopla is the assignation of a special status to pornography: the removal of pornographic texts from the fold of literature. Pornographic literature is considered so specialized that it is not allowed to stand alone as art or cultural expression; it is instead always greater than the sum of its parts, weighed down by feminist theory, middle class prudery and loathing of the body, fear of sex and nature, and conformist ideals. Pornographic literature is considered a cultural aberration, in the words of critic Susan Sontag, a "malady to be diagnosed and an occasion for judgement" (Sontag 1969, 133). It is, moreover, socially divisive, something that one is either for or against, and while one may like or dislike a particular literary genre, such as science fiction or detective novels, one does not normally take a moral position toward it. Thus, like the phenomenon of s/m itself, literature about s/m is seen by many to signify a group sickness and pathology;

Conservatives wring their hands over the increasing debauchery and moral decay of our culture—one page from *Histoire d'O* could ruin us all ; one chapter of *Bear* could cause havoc in our national parks. Liberalism in all its amorphousness and vacillation takes a more circumspect approach but makes it clear that it is holding its nose while it does so.

One of the principal complaints about pornographic literature is that it willfully incites sexual excitement in the reader. However, literature both good and bad arouses a variety of feelings and emotions in readers. To categorize a sexual response to literature as somehow less valid or ennobling than any other response is a groundless position. Sontag comments on the perceived contrast between pornographic literature and canonized literature: "It may then be argued that pornography's aim, that of inducing sexual excitement, is at odds with the tranquil, detached involvement evoked by genuine art. But this seems particularly unconvincing, in view of the much admired appeal to the reader's moral feelings that 'realistic' writing generally intends" (Sontag 1969, 135). Many works of literature elicit a wide variety of responses; sexual arousal may be only one of many. For Sontag, no aesthetic principles exist that could bar pornography from the realm of literature (p 141). For her, the advancement of art is about transgression, a search for authenticity and an exploration of consciousness, even the most extreme, the most libidinous, the most heretical. For Sontag, "[the artist's] principal means of fascinating is to advance one step further in the dialectic of outrage. To make his work repulsive, obsessive, inaccessible; in short, to give what is, or seems to be, *not* wanted. . . . The exemplary modern artist is a broker in madness" (p 141).

Another criticism of pornographic literature is that it lacks the usual plot development (beginning, middle, end) that characterizes conventional literature, and that it cares little for the aesthetics of presentation, language, voice, imagery, and so on. Yet the same charge could be levelled against a number of genres, like post-modern texts, Dadaist texts and experimental fiction. Other critics complain that characters are not fully developed in pornographic fiction, yet the same is also true of other kinds of fiction, like the detective novel, which relies almost solely on plot to advance the action. To charges that pornographic literature reveals an unreal kind of world, we need only remember that the genres of fantasy and science fiction, which are quite acceptable now, show that a lack of verisimilitude is not unique to pornography.

All these objections might lead one to suspect that one reason why pornographic literature is unsettling is because it is so close to home. In an article in *The Erotic Impulse*, Richard Goldstein comments on one element of pornography that rarely rates a mention in critical analyses: the element of the personal. Goldstein notes that in much criticism of pornography, literary and otherwise, the personal reaction, the admission that the critic may have even been slightly affected by what he has read, are conspicuously absent. For Goldstein, this evasion is understandable; we prefer to keep our imaginations and fantasies confined, and admitting that any part of a pornographic work is arousing admits our own perversions, infantilism or shame. For Goldstein, though, this reaction shows a lack of understanding of the creative and vital role that fantasy is supposed to play in our lives; pornographic fantasies allow us to create a world without consequences (Goldstein 1979, 87). This liberating mental world is important as a symbolic structure.

> This is the realm of infancy, to which we may not, must not, return. Except symbolically. We don't want to live in a world where children are initiated into sex by their parents and teachers, but we may want to imagine it. (p 87)

Meanwhile, the world continues to revolve and pornography continues on its merry way, entering the electronic 90s with a billion dollar bang. Like it or not, clearly pornography is here to stay. To repeat Arcand's words, "pornography exists because democracy exists" (Arcand 1993, 167) and unless we wish to allow governments and special interest groups to control the very substance of our imaginations, it must be so. For Paglia, pornography must be tolerated because it expands our creative potential; the imagination must not be subject to policing. Pornography is a conduit for the demonic forces of the universe and cannot be separated from art, for the two are inter-related to a far greater degree than ever admitted in humanistic criticism (Paglia 1990, 24).

Part 2

Feminism and Pornography: A Distaff David meets Goliath

I am woman, hear me roar . . .
— as sung by Helen Reddy

It's not my revolution if I can't dance to it.
— Emma Goldman

With the rise of modern feminism and the consciousness that resulted from the bra-burning and political activism of the '60s, a new woman was born in the West. The development of the birth control pill allowed women a previously unachievable physical freedom: the exercise of almost complete control over reproductive functions. The far-reaching and profound effects of this innovation cannot be underestimated: fewer children meant that women had more time for pursuits outside the traditional domestic domain. These new opportunities engendered a new sense of being which has seen its fruition in women's entry into traditionally male bastions, like science and politics, as well as the rise of modern feminism. It has also seen a redefinition of the ways in which women view their own sexuality, which, like everything else in this culture, has become an object of empirical study. All previous assumptions about sexuality were questioned; new statistics and survey reports were endlessly pored over. Feminists began to pay a lot of attention to the position of women in the world, the portrayal of women in the public sphere and the oppression of women as a class. A new consciousness began to take form, one that condemned roles traditionally assigned to women: housekeepers, mothers, and objects of male sexual desire. And for better or for worse, nothing was immune from the growing strength and influence of feminism: language changed to become "inclusive"; we now have fishers instead of fishermen, councillors instead of aldermen and sewage covers instead of manhole covers; there are affirmative action campaigns which strive to achieve gender parity in employer hiring practices; and we have seen the politicization along gender lines of almost everything social, including the home. However, gains initially made by mainstream feminism were eventually seen as inadequate by a new strain of radical, or gender, feminism.

Feminism has never existed as a monolithic, united movement. It has evolved, split and factionalized over the last several decades. During the social revolution of the

1960s feminism was far more inclined to celebrate physical and sexual freedom and the beauty of the body. However, by the 1970s, that celebration of sensuality and physicality took a decidedly dour turn and new, angry, political voices began to make themselves heard. It was time for decisive action: "The politics of liberation had failed; it was time for the politics of rage" (McElroy 1995, 187). In 1970, Kate Millet published *Sexual Politics*, in which she proposed that women had been "confined to the cultural level of animal life" (cited in McElroy, 86). In 1975, Susan Brownmiller published her influential *Against Our Will*, which portrayed men as historically conditioned to rape. Gloria Steinem, future editor of *Ms* magazine, clad in floppy ears and a tight bodice festooned with a puffy tail, masqueraded as a Playboy Bunny to gain entry into the decadent world of *Playboy* publisher Hugh Hefner; she appalled many women with her lurid accounts of the sexism and demeaning attitudes that she encountered. By the beginning of the '80s, the tide had turned. Increasingly disenchanted feminists began to look for bogey men to explain certain failures of feminism; the fact that so many women were not buying into the program, or never had; the continued discrepancies in social and financial equality between the genders; the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to pass in the U.S. That bogey man was pornography and it was to be found between the covers of *Playboy* and *Hustler* and in triple X movies. For the radical feminists, pornography was the main reason for women's continuing oppression because it perpetuated the stereotypical view of women as both victims and temptresses, and it promoted and collaborated with male sexual hegemony. A growing conviction was arising that the low status of women was related directly to women's traditional sexual role. Radical feminism was no longer about equal pay for equal work: it was now a theoretical and polemical position. It proposed a different interpretation of the world, suggesting that instead of being immutable or biological realities, gender and sex were both cultural constructs. The corollary of this position is, of course, that if sex can be constructed, it can also be deconstructed. The key to this deconstruction was the rejection of all male institutions that had defined and oppressed women for centuries (McElroy 1995, 90).

The principal forces behind the popularization of the radical feminist agenda are two American feminists, Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. Together MacKinnon and Dworkin had a major effect on the feminist stance vis à vis pornography and on the implementation of anti-pornography laws both in the U.S. and in Canada. Unlike the rest of us who struggle with the grey areas surrounding pornography, for Dworkin and MacKinnon there is no hesitation, no question:

pornography, which they defined as "sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words" is a social evil that promotes unhealthy stereotypes about women and leads to their oppression (Strossen 1995, 106). Pornography is violence against women. [30]

Very few escaped the missionary-like, anti-male zeal of these two activists. Their responses to women who did not accept their agenda were either quick and punishing or their female opponents were dismissed as enemies, too pathetic to know that they were dupes. Their opinions of males were vitriolic. Dworkin characterized all heterosexual intercourse as "a bitter personal death, it [intercourse] means remaining the victim, forever annihilating all self-respect. It means acting out the female role, incorporating the masochism, self-hatred and passivity which are central to it " (cited in Strossen 1995, 108). For MacKinnon, feminism considers sexuality as a "social sphere of male power of which forced sex is paradigmatic" (ibid, 110).

Early in the 1980s, the city of Minneapolis hired Dworkin and MacKinnon as consultants to write legislation aimed at shutting down the city's sex trade. The legislation they proposed was breathtaking in the scope of power it would have given the city to arrest people for sexual violations. In essence, they had prepared legislation that, if put into place, would have redefined pornography as sexual discrimination with sweeping legal recourse for victims of such discrimination—any notion of consensuality, any thought that a woman might willingly strip or pose nude or become a prostitute were completely dismissed (McElroy 1995, 92). To bolster their case, they then organized public hearings, calling only their own witnesses, primarily victims of sexual abuse and various sociologists but excluding civil or gay rights advocates or anyone involved in the pornography industry. Although the ordinance passed, the mayor of Minneapolis vetoed it.

Next, they were hired by the then mayor of Indianapolis, a Presbyterian minister, to do the same in that city. The ordinance passed again, but was eventually challenged by a coalition of booksellers and publishers who were alarmed by the anti-democratic potential; the ordinance was eventually repealed. MacKinnon and Dworkin were also enlisted to prepare ordinances in Suffolk County (New York); Madison, Wisconsin; and Los Angeles County. The American Supreme Court eventually ruled that the proposed ordinances violated freedom of speech guaranteed by the 1st Amendment of the American Constitution. However, that was not the end of the story. Dworkin and MacKinnon continued their anti-pornography activities, no doubt feeling some eventual vindication by the fact that in 1992, the Canadian Supreme Court, in *Butler Vs. Regina*, enshrined the Dworkin/MacKinnon proposal into law.

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[30] According to researchers Abramson and Pinkerton, there is no evidence that pornography causes rape. In fact, by providing an alternative outlet for sexual urges, the opposite may be true. They point out that in Japan, where violent pornography is the norm, the incidence of rape is 1/16th that of the U.S., and in both Germany and Denmark, sex crimes were reduced when the availability of porn was increased. (Abramson, Pinkerton 1995, 190)

> It restricted the importation of material that "degrades" or "dehumanizes" women. The Court recognized pornography to be an aspect of free expression, but ruled that the prevention of harm to women was more important than free speech. Ironically, this obscenity law has been used almost exclusively against gay, lesbian, and feminist material. (McElroy 1995, 93)

Ironically, but not unexpectedly, the conflation of the terms "harm" and "pornography" which was supported by the *Butler* decision had many negative ramifications for feminists, lesbians and male homosexuals, whose bookstores and publications saw a huge increase in harassment and seizures after the *Butler* decision came down. "Within the first two and a half years after the *Butler* decision, well over half of all Canadian feminist bookstores had had materials confiscated or detained by customs. From Quebec to Victoria, Canadian bookstore managers had the same comment: that *Butler* increased censorship in Canada by customs, police, and lower courts, and the predominant targets have been gay, lesbian, and women's literature" (Strossen 1995, 231). In fact, quite ironically, two of Andrea Dworkin's own anti-pornography books, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* and *Women Hating*, were seized at the U.S. border by Canadian Customs.[31]

The broad definitions of pornography proposed by the pornophobic radical feminists are troubling, as are their claims that all pornography is dehumanizing and degrading to women. Their contention that pornography is the same as sexual harassment is based on two false premises: first, that all sexually explicit material is discriminatory and second that all such expression is harassment (Strossen 1995, 119). Sexuality and sexism, while cognates of the same noun, are not the same thing. The notion that women are demeaned by sex and sexual expression is fatuous in that it reflects archaic, infantalizing stereotypes that have been used to deny women full equality, not only in employment and education, but in society at large (pp 119-20); and it shows a complete lack of appreciation of the erotic and its role in the imaginative life of both men and women. The preponderance of visual pornography geared toward men, for example, may simply be because "most heterosexual women are not aroused by pictorial representations of naked men" (Abramson and Pinkerton 1995, 184). Quite simply, men and women are aroused by different things; as Christensen (1990) notes, researchers have found that a significant aspect of male sexual desire is its strongly visual nature (1990). Abramson and Pinkerton note the work of feminist Beatrice Faust, who in her 1980 work, *Women, Sex and Pornography* says:

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[31] In addition to protecting us from sexually explicit material, Canada Customs is also ensuring that we don't overdue it in the gym or in the kitchen—*Doing it Debbie's Way*, an exercise video by Debbie Reynolds and *Hot, Hotter, Hottest*, a book about spicy cuisine are just two of the hundreds of titles seized over the years at the border (Strossen 1995, 238). Canada Customs: on guard for us.

> Kinsey, *The Hite Report*, and the *Viva* experiment all suggest that women's indifference to visual pornography derives from something more intractable than negative messages about sex. . . . If women reject the freedom to enjoy pornography and even male cheesecake, it must be because—no matter what permissions society gives us—women do not want it. (p 184)

One of the subtexts of the feminist anti-porn movement is that, if pornography depicts a bad kind of sex, there must exist the opposite: a good kind of sex, a sex of romance, and flowers and midnight walks on the beach. This kind of sex is sanitized, devoid of vulgarity, messiness and aggression. The physicality of the sexual act is displaced; the emphasis is on relationships and feelings, definitely not on organs. This kind of orthodox sexuality, incarnated in popular culture in the form of books like the Harlequin romance series, is no less an inaccurate and prescriptive generalization of female pleasure than typical heterosexual male pornography.

With respect to the issue of harassment, the definition of that word is at best, elusive. To label all pornography as harassment is to allow MacKinnon/Dworkin to arrogate unto themselves the right to decide what pleases or does not please all women. Furthermore, it sets up a scenario in which women are assumed to be unable to solve their own problems: they need city ordinances and thought police available at all times just in case they should see or read something that upsets. The fact that radical feminists à la Dworkin/MacKinnon have seen a generally widespread acceptance of their viewpoint in this regard only perpetuates the notion that women are hapless victims and also trivializes the issue—can a "sexual look" really be compared to rape? While there is no denying that women experience violence at the hands of men, anti-porn feminists want to lay the blame on sex, rather than on more likely underlying causes, such as poverty, or the innate violence of mankind.

For Catherine MacKinnon, all visual heterosexual pornography involves coercion of the women involved, but apparently not of the men. Further, an involvement in the sex industry is clearly exploitive of women, yet Christensen (1990) discovers an irony here when he points out first of all, that the vast majority of women involved in the sex trade admit to liking their jobs; and secondly, that much of pornography, particularly in visual mediums, attracts men who are painfully shy, physically or psychologically impaired, unable to attract women or who have no other sexual outlet. He wonders quite rightly, just who is exploiting whom. MacKinnon has claimed that pornography is a form of sexual slavery, a fatuous argument which betrays a deep misunderstanding of pornography and trivializes slavery. According to her, because pornography elicits physical responses, it cannot be considered speech and therefore cannot be protected under the aegis of the (American) constitution. How arbitrary this last point is is clear if we consider that movies that make us cry and books that make us laugh could then also be exempt from the protection of freedom of speech and expression legislation. In addition, the boundaries between speech and what is not speech are very blurred, indeed.

Feminist Factions—I Have Seen the Enemy and She is Us

Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.
— feminist Robin Morgan

Feminism . . . completely misses the blood-lust in rape, the joy of violation and destruction. . . . Women may be less prone to such fantasies because they physically lack the equipment for sexual violence. They do not know the temptation of forcibly invading the sanctuary of another body.
— Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*

Feminism and pornography have a common, but conflicting interest: they both focus on women as sexual beings. Pornography is the representation of the physical act of sex itself; feminism examines the impact of sex upon women—historically, economically, politically and culturally (McElroy 1995, 128). Discordant voices within the feminist movement with respect to pornography are many. In her 1995 work *A Woman's Right to Pornography*, Wendy McElroy identifies three separate feminist factions:

- radical feminists, like Dworkin and MacKinnon, who openly detest men, consider heterosexual sex a violation of women ipso facto and believe that pornography is not a matter of taste; rather it is an "act" of violence against women.

- liberal feminists whom McElroy characterizes as offering a glimmer of hope to the hysterical anti-pornography chorus. These feminists may not like pornography, but they will defend to the death the right to read it or see it. Liberal feminism quite rightly questions *who* will act as censors and points out that many types of literature that the radical feminists would censor are feminist works themselves. Liberal feminists shudder when they consider the impossibly far reaching scope of censorship, and they were the first to note that anti-pornography legislation perpetuates the woman-as-victim motif. Finally, liberal feminism asserts that the virulent anti-pornography stance of radical feminism detracts attention from real and more troubling issues that affect almost all women, such as the availability of child care, poverty, new reproductive techniques. etc.

- individualistic feminists who believe in a woman's right to make her own decisions about issues such as pornography. These feminists recognize that early feminism fought for exactly this and other privileges, including the right to own property and write contracts, and the right to be considered full-fledged members of society with all the responsibility that entails. It would appear that current radical feminism seems to want to reverse these gains and have women given special treatment again, as though women are not strong enough to deal with life's ups and downs and, like children and imbeciles, need protection.[32]

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[32] I am reminded of the national furor that ensued in the Manitoba legislature a couple of years ago, when a member of the provincial parliament mocked the squeaky voice of then provincial NDP leader, Sharon Carstairs. In an interview on CBC radio, the leader of a Manitoba woman's group expressed outrage at this sexist attack on Ms. Carstairs and longed for the days when women will be judged on abilities, not physical attributes. Ironically, current Reform Party leader Preston Manning is teased mercilessly about his own squeaky and rather high-pitched voice with no backlash or cries of sexism. Apparently, what's good for the goose is **not** always good for the gander.

Despite the power that gender feminists have wielded over the years, numerous voices have been raised in opposition to their proscriptive and intolerant orthodoxy. Many people, feminists and non-feminists alike, have re-evaluated the scope of anti-pornography legislation and re-examined and reaffirmed ideals of free speech. There are also those reasonable voices who speak against a paternalistic (maternalistic?) censorship of sexually explicit materials, believing that such censorship is reminiscent of attitudes popular in the pre-woman's suffrage era of this century; at that time, many men and women alike believed that politics was not for women, not because they were inferior, but because they were superior, too delicate to be burdened with the sordid details of company and country managing. Women needed special protection (Tannahill 1992, 390). This same patronizing attitude is expressed by the MacDworkinites and their followers; their opposition to pornography (indeed to sexuality) has an ominous subtext—women are mentally frail creatures who need to be protected from the world. We should, therefore, entrust our future moral edification to the gender feminists, who are strong enough not to be co-opted by sexually explicit material, and who have taken upon themselves the task of censoring every image that might filter into delicate and impressionable female minds. In this respect, anti-pornography feminism has made a rather unholy alliance—right wing, Christian fundamentalist politicians who, when speaking of pornography, use very similar rhetoric to promote their anti-sex agenda of family values, unflinching Christianity and traditional roles. The irony is that, if the anti-pornography right wing fundamentalists in this country and in the U.S. had their way, women like Dworkin and MacKinnon might never have been heard from at all—they would have been at home having children and cleaning house.

Nadine Strossen, the President of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), disagrees strongly with the "MacDworkinites." She feels that the platform of radical feminists would curtail freedom of speech and expression, the cornerstones of democracy. According to Strossen, the MacDworkinite ideas of censorship threaten other forms of expression as well. Part of the problem, of course, is the issue of definition: what is sexist to one person is not sexist to another. Once we start scrutinizing peoples' speech for signs of incorrect thought, it is not much longer before we are censoring on many more grounds that gender correctness. As Strossen notes

> If we should restrict sexually explicit speech because it purveys sexist ideas, as the feminist antipornography faction argues, then why shouldn't we restrict non-sexually explicit speech when it purveys sexist ideas? And if speech conveying sexist ideas can be restricted, then why shouldn't speech be restricted when it

> conveys racist, heterosexist and other biased ideas? . . . Make no mistake: if accepted, the feminist procensorship analysis would lead inevitably to the suppression of far more than pornography. At stake is all sexually oriented speech, any expression that *allegedly* subordinates or undermines the equality of any group, and any speech that *may* have a tendency to lead to any kind of harm. One might well ask about the feminist procensorship philosophy, not what expression would be stifled, but rather, what expression would be safe. (emphasis added) (1995, 39-40)

Not unexpectedly, Camille Paglia is also extremely critical of the Dworkin/MacKinnon faction. According to Paglia, radical feminists hate pornography because they never think about nature, and therefore cannot reasonably deal with sex (1994, 110). For her, feminists like Dworkin and MacKinnon make a basic error in identifying pornography with society: they think society is patriarchal and oppressive, therefore pornography must be so.

The logical end-point of the gender feminist complaint that pornography reduces women to sex objects is to deny women's sexuality completely. But, the fact remains that women are sexual. The idea that sex degrades women reveals a philosophy which finds sex itself degrading. Learned shame and disgust have conspired to deny women pleasure and have contributed to joylessness and even trauma for many women over the years (Christensen, 1990). In her 1995 book *Talk Dirty to Me*, writer Sallie Tisdale elaborates on the positive influence that pornography has had on her life. Like Paglia, Strossen, McElroy, Rice, Bright, Faust and Carol Vance, Tisdale objects to the strait-jacketing of female consciousness espoused by the gender feminists. For Tisdale, pornophobic feminists (and others) conflate the phenomenon of pornography with the broader matrix of culture with the result that all sexual constructions, even the "male gaze," become obscene and oppressive. This hostility toward males translates into a hostility toward the culture as a whole and it also introduces the notion of a feminine hierarchy: those who "buy into" the pornographic male world are either sell outs or bad girls.

> They (the MacDworkinite feminists) are themselves prurient, scurrying after sex in every corner. They look down on me and shake a finger: *Bad girl. Mustn't touch.*
>
> That branch of feminism tells me my very thoughts are bad. Pornography tells me the opposite: that none of my thoughts are bad. . . . What a misogynistic worldview this is, this claim that women who make such choices cannot be making free choices at all—are not free to make a choice. Feminists against pornography have done a sad and awful thing. *They* have made women into objects. (Tisdale 1994, 158)

Part 3

Rebels with Causes

Sex awakens my unconscious: pornography gives it a face.
—*Sallie Tisdale*

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Réage, Rice and Engel all broke ground by challenging notions of the political correctness of fantasies and the hegemony of feminist polemicists. All three writers oppose anti-sexuality feminist orthodoxy, by positing extremely sensualized worlds where women make their own choices regarding the dynamics of their own relationships—they do not challenge feminism; rather they use sexuality in their writing to promote women's agenda, to assert the validity of the female imagination, to reclaim previously disputed territory. It is not sex that is the enemy; rather, it is prudery and narrowness of vision. Sexuality and the exploration of it offer a route to liberation. Clearly the female protagonists of the novels discussed here are active participants in their own quests, which have physical components, but are essentially spiritual. For O and Lisa, sado-masochistic role playing is the way to a deeper self-knowledge and self revelation. Lou, meanwhile, creates a cocoon-like world where at least for a time, the strictures of the outside world have no place and she is free to experiment. Her brief fling with bestiality is initially ingenuous and innocent; eventually, though, she rejects her actions and comes back to herself, but with a sense of renewal, not shame.

As an educated woman of letters, Pauline Réage was exposed early in life to great works of literature that often were considered scandalous and perhaps not fit reading for a teenaged girl. She mentions works by Boccaccio and Crébillon *fils* which were part of her father's extensive library, along with many other similar books, which she read with her father's full approbation. Her influences in later life were Colette, Conrad, Racine, Vigny, Proust, Villon, Shakespeare, Baudelaire and the Bible. For Réage, books are a community, a country:

> Vous voyez, je suis bourrée de littérature, comme d'autres de religion. Mais la littérature aussi aide à vivre. Et ma patrie, ce sont les livres. (cited in Deforges 1975, 113)

Clearly, for Réage, the imaginative world that we create when we read is a privileged one. But it is, importantly, not a real one. Nevertheless, in the words of Sade, she had "critics, contradictors and enemies." In her 1975 interview with Régine Deforges, she recounts various adjectives which she heard used to describe O: "ordure," "ignoble," "immonde," "mal écrit et mal pensé"; she was accused of having dishonoured all women and was an "espèce de salope" for having stooped so low (cited in Deforges, 81). However, Réage makes no apologies for her vision. For her, being offended by what people like and dislike is not only inconceivable, it is pointless. Further, she sees no relationship between moral strictures and the physical pleasure. The concept of fantasy and the practice of the imagination which so deeply inform *Histoire d'O* are means of liberating women, first of all from men's assumptions about the poverty of women's erotic lives, and secondly from the confines of culture with its stultifying notions of decency and shame. In her 1975 interview with Réage, over 20 years after *O's* appearance, Régine Deforges asked about her feelings with respect to feminism. Réage acknowledged that women have suffered inequalities over the years, but felt that militant feminism was not the answer. Although she never belonged to a formal feminist group, she nevertheless considered herself a feminist although, as she admitted, she never considered herself inferior to men: ". . . dans mon cas, c'est que je n'ai pas, via-à-vis des hommes en général, le moindre sentiment d'infériorité, ni tant d'admiration pour eux" (p 81). To those who chastised her for her feminist apostasy in having made O too submissive, too accommodating, Réage makes it clear that O is living out her imagination: she is therefore a liberator of female erotic desire, and reflects the universality of the female erotic experience. O is the cipher through which women, who have hitherto been afraid, can voice their fantasies. O, as symbolized by the single-lettered name, is Everywoman, stateless, almost nameless.

> Is there a woman alive who has not, at least at certain moments of her life, been prey to fantasies, obsessed by erotic dreams, which she spins out despite whatever festivities or disasters are going on around her. Who it is who confesses is of no importance. All that matters is that she does. Pauline Réage is nothing but the mask through which the first to speak out has said her piece. O is stateless, without the normal marks of identity, little more than a low voice, like a shadow that murmurs in the night. (cited in Deforges 1979, 146)

In *Histoire d'O*, Pauline Réage intuitively explores the inter-relationship between sex and death. She is drawn to destruction because it is inherent in creation, because everything is made in order to be destroyed, to be discarded, to *not* endure. . . When you bring a child into this world, you bring it not only life, but death (ibid, 91). Indeed, for Réage, the body is the place of ultimate triumph and disaster. "What more can you do with it than to use it to prove to the person you love that you belong to him, and therefore no longer belong to yourself? . . . What O says to her lover, without actually using these words, is the phrase that true believers repeat over and over again, *in manuas tuas, Domine*. 'Into thy hands, O Lord . . . ' What does a Christian seek but to lose himself in God? To be killed by someone you love strikes me as the epitome of ecstasy" (cited in Deforges 1979, 93-94).

Like the most sophisticated theologian or the most primitive tribesman, Réage realizes that the sexual experience is primary, that it brings humans to the brink of both death and life. As Joseph Campbell stated, the god of death is also the lord of sex (Campbell 1988, 109).

Anne Rice also intuits the complicated relationship between death and sex in *Exit to Eden*, in the character of Elliot Slater, who has almost been killed a number of times during the course of his job as a photographer. For Rice, and for her character, sado-masochistic role playing is a way to approach the edge of the abyss safely, on a symbolic level; it becomes a way to explore the troubling relationship which is sometimes established between aggression and the sexual instinct, between dominance and submission. For Anne Rice, part of the task of the writer or artist is to challenge established mores and values: no topic should be forbidden treatment by the artist. In this respect, Rice echoes Sontag, who valorized the advancement of art through extreme modes of communication and endeavour, through transgression, and heresy. In *Exit to Eden*, indeed in all her erotic writings, Rice explores areas of human emotions and the psyche that generally are the realm of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, areas that are laden with potential danger. In *Exit to Eden*, she explores a kind of superhuman, transcendent love that goes beyond the characters' knowledge of themselves and their physical limitations and instead becomes a metaphysical journey.

Rice identifies Nabokov's *Lolita* as being a major, early influence. Like Nabokov, she wanted to write about the intensity of a devotion that transcends physical desire, and explore emotional domains which offer psychological risk (Ramsland 1996, 11).[33] Her move to San Francisco in the 1960s coincided with various American Supreme Court decisions that facilitated the publication, distribution and enhanced availability of sexually explicit material. Rice found herself in the right place at the right time: San Francisco was a focal point for the counterculture, the hippie and free love movements of the 60s and early 70s, whose attempts to reorganize society and demystify sexuality met a very receptive mind in Rice. For her, repressing sexual expression was a kind of enforced ignorance that could only lead to a spiritual gap. She considered it the duty of the artist to push and test limits. Writers should be our sirens, the madmen and madwomen of the world, and the function of the art they create is to question existing norms, roles and presumptions. "We want our madmen and madwomen to be offensive. That's the way culture works. It's when you have a free artistic marketplace that people have freedom to create the classics of tomorrow" (cited in Ramsland 1996, 19). Along with novels by Nabokov and Miller, Rice was introduced to Terry Southern's *Candy*, Anaïs Nin's *Delta of Venus*, Sade and other like works, including *Story of O*. Her summation of the first chapter of *O*: "Wow, terrific, fabulous" (ibid, 19). However, after finishing the entire novel, she summed *O* up as "too sinister"; she felt it took itself too seriously and that sexual freedom should not end in death (p 20). It was at this point that she wrote her first erotic short story, "The Sufferings of Charlotte", a masochistic fantasy. Clearly, Réage's novel, as bleak as it was to the young writer, set the stage for an entire career. As more s/m inspired stories began to appear, Rice met with censure from some feminist circles. Her response was direct and evocative of Réage:

> I believe in fantasy and in the right of women to express themselves in erotic fiction. Let women talk. Let them tell what they really want. For the first time in history, women can express themselves as men have always done. (ibid, 22)

The 1980s continued to see an expansion of erotic writings by females: Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden*, the erotic journal *Yellow Silk* and *Ladies' Home Erotica* were readily available. The rise of these publications, however, was met with a concomitant hardening of heart and will on the part of increasingly militant gender feminists. Rice has been and still is a vocal and eloquent critic of these groups. She feels that women telling women what they should *not* enjoy is no different from men telling women what they *should* enjoy. She feels that women's attitudes have experienced a positive evolution, from a stand of subservience and indoctrination, to a point where women feel free to explore their own sexuality and fantasies, without the strictures of domination either by males, or by other females:

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[33] *Lolita* is the story of a pedophile who marries a woman to be near her daughter, the eponymous nymph Lolita. Finished in 1954, four American publishers refused it before it was eventually accepted for publication in 1958 by Girodias' Olympia press. John de St Jorre tells the fascinating story of the trials and tribulations of *Lolita* in *The Good Ship Venus: The Erotic Voyage of the Olympia Press*, (1994).

> I regard my writing of pornography to be a real moral cause. And I don't want a bunch of fascist reactionary feminists kicking in the door of my consciousness with their jackboots and telling me that sadomasochism isn't politically correct. (ibid, 34)

For Rice, pornography can be literature; no subject matter can debase language. As Goldstein notes above pornography proffers an imaginary realm, a place to visit, but not necessarily take up residence.

If Pauline Réage is a somewhat unwilling feminist (or perhaps a pre-feminist), and Anne Rice is a feminist "with an attitude," Marian Engel is a perhaps a quasi-feminist, straddling the middle ground between these two. Engel scholar Elizabeth Brady comments on the middle-of-the-road, or transitional, nature of Engel's prose, deemed so because she does not write from the "more subversive viewpoints that inform radical feminist and overtly lesbian novels" (Brady 1987, 9). She quotes Engel as saying "I know I'm usually considered reasonably retrograde by the women's movement. I don't know whether there is such a thing as a free woman, or a free person, or whether, indeed, freedom is desirable" (cited in Brady, 9).[34] As Brady points out, though, the desirability for freedom is a central tenet, "the one unnegotiable premise" of contemporary feminism. She adds that the fiction that underwrites this tenet is clearly political, and extends beyond bourgeois values and patriarchal validation. In contrast, Engel's general preoccupations are with conventional, well-educated heroines, relationships and marriage. (Although Brady notes that *Bear* is the exception to this norm, I would contend that except for the bizarre act of bestiality, the novel does fit many conventional modes.) Engel admits to being uncomfortable with the radicalization of the text, with experiments in form, with searches for different strategies of linguistic subversion and the attempt to create a "woman's discourse" (p 10). Indeed, she distanced herself from such notions: "To a certain extent, you have to look at sexism as a historical and sociological accident; you can't start mucking up the English language in an attempt to redress that accident" (p 10).

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[34] The illusory quality of freedom was also something that interested Réage, who felt that work was "un esclavage" but also necessary: "Vivre, rien que vivre, c'est difficile. Il faut être libre et être contraint. . . . Il ne faut pas être dans le vide" (cited in Deforges 1975, 53-54).

Nevertheless, Engel was clearly aware of gender issues in life and with respect to her writing. For Engel, being a woman made a difference in writing; it meant "working in opposition." Engel characterized gender as a "region" (p 5). The writer's task then is to explore and push the boundaries of this region. Verduyn notes that, to achieve this goal, Engel used a process of revisioning, which "engages the feminist notion of taking another look, seeing again with fresh eyes" (Verduyn 1995, 5). Certainly, in that *Bear* breaks the traditional male/female dichotomy, it can be seen as a "revisioning" of conventional relationships.

Marian Engel was extremely well read and fluent in three languages (English, French and Spanish). It would be difficult to pin down any one single major influence on her writing. Once when asked if any writer had influenced her, her response was "almost every writer I've ever read" (cited in Brady 1987, 5). However, when pressed, she did identify T.S. Eliot, the English mystics, Durrell, Woolf, Lessing and Murdoch; in Spanish, Cortazar, García Márquez and Borges. She was particularly well versed in French literature, citing Sand, Flaubert, Proust, Gide, Colette, Camus, Sagan and Butor as particular favourites. She had also read *Histoire d'O*, with which she seems to have connected psychically: at the time she was undergoing severe personal crises and was in therapy. According to Verduyn (1985, 125), Engel identifies with O's desire to be degraded. "How did O and I get that way?" Engel wrote, "How can I get rid of my albatross of guilt?" (p 126).

One way to expunge her guilt was through writing, through entering previously uncharted territory (bestiality) and through what critic Coral Ann Howell refers to as "rehabilitative pornography" (cited in Verduyn 1995, 235). In *Bear*, Engel deals with both symbolic and actual taboo busting. It is revealed that Lou has had a sorry history of relationships with [illegible]; sterility was the defining metaphor of her romantic life. Her breaking of the bestiality taboo serves to stop the cycle of sterility and brings her back to a more wholesome realization of her place in the world. Oddly, although the pivotal action of *Bear* is subversive, the novel seems less so than either *O* or *Exit to Eden*. Lou's bear incident, while a climactic and unforgettable incident in her life, does not define that life; bestiality is not a code by which she lives, nor a way of life that she pursues—it is an aberration, a moment frozen in time; it is both perverse *and* taboo. Réage and Rice on the other hand use taboo sexuality to explore themes of self-identity and self-definition. In *Histoire d'O* and *Exit to Eden*, sado-masochism is a cultural practice, a way of living, a set of beliefs and modus operandi; an elaborate but deadly serious continual one-act play.

Anne Rice is a prolific and still active writer; Marian Engel also wrote prodigiously, but died a premature death in the middle of her career; Pauline Réage quit her writing career not long after she began it, and certainly long before the advent of radical feminism, which, as we saw above, was appalled by *Histoire d'O*. Since Réage clearly was read by and influenced the other two writers, perhaps we should leave the last word to her.

> ...O brings a whole erotic universe into the light, one that is just as mad and obsessive as that of men. All those untold generations of women who out of decency or fear or modesty have failed to speak out without exception have a secret universe of the mind that though unexpressed is still there, one that is not necessarily O's—in fact, O's may well make them shake their heads in horror—but is nonetheless a reality. Till now they have held their tongues, but that time is past: from now on they'll speak out. (cited in Deforges 1979, 146)

Chapter Five

Epilogue

> Dear Anne Landers: My husband uses the Internet to hook up with other Internet
> enthusiasts. It seemed rather innocent at first, except that most of his "friends" were
> part of sex groups where people can view each other in action. . . .
> My husband insists it's no violation of his marriage vows if he has an anonymous
> sexual encounter with someone over the Internet. He says as long as there is no
> physical contact it's perfectly okay.
> — from a letter to Anne Landers, *Edmonton Journal*, June 14, 1996

> LEATHER MODEL
> DOMINA 944-6965
> — The *Edmonton Sun* personal ads, Monday, March 3, 1997

Upon my last visit to that Coles book store, I noticed that the remainder bin previously stuffed with dozens of remainder copies of *Fanny Hill* now contained cookbooks. (I doubt that the *Fanny Hills* were bought: no doubt they have taken up residence in another bin in a great warehouse somewhere.) I also noticed that the erotica section had moved up in the world by moving down: instead of being tucked away on the very highest shelf above the Popular Fiction section, and being noticeably unidentified, the entire section had shifted down and now commands a respectable, eye-level position immediately before the start of the Popular Fiction section. This unalphabetic position is fitting, I suppose, because the actual authors of the works are rather unimportant and also because most of the works are written under pseudonyms. A closer perusal of the books in this section revealed another interesting fact: most of the works were explicitly directed toward female readers, one of the major series being from Black Lace Press in England. Furthermore, although there was a sole copy of *Story of O*, most of the books' dustjackets described decidedly "soft-core" contents.

History, both personal and writ large, would seem to teach us that prohibition and censorship of anything are usually dismal failures. As Goldstein succinctly puts it in *The Erotic Impulse*, "Even if there were no pornography, there would be pornography. The libido will not be denied its representations; though they may be covert, to the eye of the beholder, their intentions will be clear" (Goldstein 1992, 90).

Despite the conceit of each age to consider itself the apogee, the end-point of cultural processes, privileged to provide final and definitive pronouncements on all things, and much as we might like to consider ourselves the discoverers of "real" pornography, we are, of course, no such thing. The practice of pornography will continue as long as people wish it to or until it is transformed into something else; and the definition of it will continue to be elusive. One thing is clear, however, and that is that since it touches one of the most sensitive and important areas of human endeavour, it will continue to be talked about.

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